

RAISING UNRULY VOICES: THE LAITY, THE VERNACULAR
AND THE CHURCH IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the effect upon the late-medieval English Church of the increased usage of the English vernacular as a medium for the discussion of doctrinal issues, by both the clergy and the laity.

Chapter One establishes a cultural context, tracing the parallel developments of the promotion of lay piety and the increasing status accorded to the English vernacular in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Chapter Two focuses upon *Piers Plowman*, and it is suggested that this work was originally intended for a purely clerical audience, but its composition in the vernacular inadvertently facilitated access by a lay readership.

Chapter Three addresses the dangers of the dissemination of hitherto proscribed anticlerical rhetoric amongst a lay readership, and investigates how Langland's conservative reformism could, when viewed from outside the clerical community, be read in an antisacerdotal light.

Chapter Four examines such a heterodox reading of *Piers Plowman* - *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* - which demonstrates the way in which orthodox material could be appropriated in order to attack the hierarchical structure of the Church itself.

Chapter Five argues that Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* display a strong Langlandian influence but, unlike the *Crede* Poet, Chaucer uses his references to *Piers Plowman* to uphold the *status quo*. It is suggested, however, that by the late fourteenth century the threat to the Church of the English vernacular had become so great that merely to discuss the Church in English was to pose a threat.

Chapter Six draws more widely upon literature of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries which owes a debt to *Piers Plowman*, in order to offer support to the conclusions drawn in chapters Four and Five. In considering a selection of works, both orthodox and heterodox, there is an accumulation of evidence of the destabilising effect upon the Church of the growth of religious discussion in the vernacular.

Chapter Seven considers the failure of the Church to address effectively the problems posed by the vernacular and, in considering the specific case of Reginald Pecock, suggests a wilful refusal by the English ecclesiastical authorities even to accept the severity of the problem.

In conclusion, it is suggested that in looking at religion in England in the pre-Reformation period we should concentrate less upon the perceived opposition between "traditional" religion and its "discontents," and more upon the broad range of cultural circumstances which led to individual expressions of piety being thus defined.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>CT.</i>	Geoffrey Chaucer, <i>The Canterbury Tales</i>
<i>PPl.</i>	William Langland, <i>Piers Plowman</i>
<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i>
<i>ChR</i>	<i>Chaucer Review</i>
<i>CQR</i>	<i>Church Quarterly Review</i>
<i>EETS e.s.</i>	<i>Early English Text Society</i> extra series
<i>EETS o.s.</i>	<i>Early English Text Society</i> original series
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>ELH</i>	<i>English Literary History</i>
<i>ES</i>	<i>English Studies</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>JWCI</i>	<i>Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes</i>
<i>LH</i>	<i>Literature and History</i>
<i>LSE</i>	<i>Leeds Studies in English</i>
<i>MAE</i>	<i>Medium Ævum</i>
<i>MLQ</i>	<i>Modern Language Quarterly</i>
<i>MLR</i>	<i>Modern Language Review</i>
<i>MP</i>	<i>Modern Philology</i>
<i>MS</i>	<i>Mediaeval Studies</i>
<i>N&Q</i>	<i>Notes and Queries</i>
<i>NM</i>	<i>Neuphilologische Mitteilungen</i>
<i>PBA</i>	<i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i>
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association</i>
<i>REAL</i>	<i>Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature</i>
<i>RES</i>	<i>Review of English Studies</i>
<i>Rolls</i>	<i>Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores</i>
<i>SAC</i>	<i>Studies in the Age of Chaucer</i>
<i>SCH</i>	<i>Studies in Church History</i>
<i>SP</i>	<i>Studies in Philology</i>
<i>Spec</i>	<i>Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies</i>
<i>YES</i>	<i>Yearbook of English Studies</i>
<i>YLS</i>	<i>Yearbook of Langland Studies</i>
<i>ZAA</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik</i>

INTRODUCTION

“The crucial factor in the growth of a well-instructed laity in fifteenth-century England,” writes Duffy, “was the spread of literacy down the social scale, even to many women.”¹ This well-instructed laity is seen as actively participating in “traditional” religion; that is:

a religious culture which was rooted in a repertoire of inherited and shared beliefs and symbols, while remaining capable of enormous flexibility and variety.²

In proposing this culturally all-embracing system of devotional behaviour, Duffy sets out to provide a corrective to the view of the English religious landscape of the late Middle Ages which is perhaps suggested by much recent scholarship, which has tended to concentrate upon the exceptional and the particular; “the Lollards, witches, and leisured aristocratic ladies.”³

Whilst Duffy’s work indeed provides a timely reminder of the countless Christians of all stations whose unquestioning, and unquestioned, orthodoxy absented them from subsequent record, I shall argue in the present thesis that this spread of literacy - more specifically, the spread of vernacular literacy - makes it impossible to take this notion of “traditional” religion at face value. Duffy states that “serious interest in religious education in the vernacular could tip over into, or become confused with, Lollardy.” However, I shall suggest, using fourteenth- to sixteenth-century appropriations and manipulations of *Piers Plowman* as a “case study,” that the use of the vernacular for the discussion of doctrinal

¹ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400-1580* (London, 1992), p.68.

² *Ibid.*, p.3.

³ *Ibid.*, p.2. For an extensive survey of developments in the study of English medieval ecclesiastical history over the last half-century, see Peter Heath, “Between Reform and Reformation: The English Church in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,” *JEH* 41 (1990): 647-678.

issues itself rendered the doctrinally orthodox potentially threatening to the Church.

The Book of Margery Kempe offers many examples of a pious, outspoken laywoman coming into conflict with the Church.⁴ Margery, however, may be seen as a rather extreme example, so I should like to introduce my topic by offering instead a brief example of a fourteenth-century dramatisation of an intelligent laywoman's brush with a representative of the Church; that of Chaucer's Wife of Bath and Friar:⁵

“Dame,” quod he, “God yeve yow right good lyf!
Ye han heer touched, also moot I thee,
In scole-matere greet difficultee.
Ye han seyde muche thyng right wel, I seye;
But, dame, heere as we ryde by the weye,
Us nedeth nat to speken but of game,
And lete auctoritees, on Goddes name,
To prechyng and to scoles of clergie.”⁶

With these words, Chaucer's Friar graciously approves the preceding tale of the Wife of Bath, whilst at the same time mildly censuring her usurpation of a discourse which he considers to be more suited to clerics and scholars than to a lay pilgrim. Although I will, for the present, defer detailed discussion of Chaucer's place in late medieval anticlericalism,⁷ I feel that this brief interjection by the Friar provides a convenient point of entry into the subject, as it draws together a number of issues which are relevant to a broad consideration of vernacular anticlericalism in England during the period as a whole.

The Friar's prologue is frequently considered in the light of the animosity displayed

⁴ In Leicester, for example, Margery is accused of Lollardy and, consequently, examined upon points of doctrine. See Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen (Oxford, 1940), pp.107-117.

⁵ On the status of the Wife of Bath, see Mary Carruthers, “The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions,” in *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature: The Wife of Bath and All Her Sect*, ed. Ruth Evans and Lesley Johnson (London, 1994), pp.22-53. This edition of Carruthers' 1979 paper includes an *Afterword* which provides a useful survey of subsequent criticism.

⁶ *CT.*, III (D), ll.1270-77. All Chaucer references are to *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford, 1987).

⁷ See chapter Five.

between the Friar himself and the Summoner, itself reflecting a long-standing contemporary rivalry between secular clergy and the mendicant Orders. However, before this altercation gets fully underway,⁸ the Friar's first words are those quoted above in response to the Wife of Bath. It is significant, however, that this is not his first interruption, for at the close of the Wife's lengthy prologue:

The Frere lough, whan he hadde herd al this;
"Now dame," quod he, "so have I joye or blis,
This is a long preamble of a tale!"⁹

His tone in this first instance is apparently good-humoured, but it is possible that this barely necessary comment is intended to emphasise the Wife's prolixity - surely obvious to all - thereby undermining her authority in front of the assembled audience. In this may be discerned a foreshadowing of his final comments; in advising the Wife to "lete auctoritees...to prechyng and to scoles of clergie,"¹⁰ he is tacitly acknowledging a threat to his own profession from the lay voice. Although the Friar's open hostility towards the Summoner is the most prominent theme of fragment III of *The Canterbury Tales*, it is perhaps this more covert hostility towards the Wife of Bath that is most telling with regard to the standing of the English Church in the late fourteenth century. For, by this period, the established order of the Church was coming under attack from the self-proclaimed "maistrie" of the laity,¹¹ as clerical dominion over the spiritual life of the individual Christian came increasingly into question. The way in which vernacular discussion of doctrinal issues facilitated attack upon the institutional hierarchy of the Church will be addressed in the main body of the present thesis. First, however, it will be necessary to trace the historical process

⁸ The hostility has, however, been foreshadowed in ll.829-831.

⁹ *Ibid.*, III (D), ll.1270-1277.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, III (D), ll.1276-1277.

¹¹ On the issue of "maistrie" in this fragment, see Penn R. Szittyá, "The Green Yeoman as Loathly Lady: The Friar's Parody of the Wife of Bath's Tale," *PMLA* 90 (1975):389.

which prepared a fertile ground for such discussion in the late fourteenth century.

CHAPTER 1

THE ENGLISH VERNACULAR AND THE CHURCH IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

It is in the nature of historical perspective to imbue dates and events with absolute value as convenient markers for beginnings and endings, but it is important to bear in mind that they merely denote points on a continuous line. So it is with the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215; its effects were indeed far-reaching, but this was perhaps due as much to feelings already existing within the Church (in the broadest sense of the word) as it was to clerics responding to Papal authority. It has been said that

the thirteenth century was an age of centralization and reform, in which the lead had been taken by Innocent III and the Lateran Council of 1215.¹

Indeed, English diocesan constitutions from the decades following the Council, beginning with those of the 1222 Council of Oxford, show direct influence of the Lateran decrees.² It should, however, be noted that the implementation of the decrees in England was selective, and that “the main principles are clothed in localized and particularized detail.”³ Whilst it is understandable that the fourth decree, dealing specifically with the Greek Church, should arouse no attention in England, it is significant that those most widely quoted should be those pertaining to the instruction of parishioners, with particular emphasis upon the duty of annual confession,⁴ and those concerning conduct and discipline, particularly amongst clerics themselves.⁵ It may be inferred, therefore, that those decrees

¹ W.A. Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1955), p.2.

² C.R. Cheney, “Legislation of the Medieval English Church,” *EHR* 50 (1935):389.

³ Marion Gibbs and Jane Lang, *Bishops and Reform: 1215-1272*. (London, 1934), p.122.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.123.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.126-127.

which had a direct bearing upon the need for improvement in both clergy and laity (compounded by the expressed necessity of close interaction between the two in order to secure the spiritual well-being of the individual) addressed issues which were already of concern to Church authorities.

In discussing the historical context of ecclesiastical legislation and practice following the Fourth Lateran Council, Cheney has noted that

The early Church had provided for provincial assemblies to be summoned by the metropolitan twice a year, but by the eighth century annual councils became the rule. While this was confirmed by the Fourth Lateran Council, the later rule was not perfectly observed any more than the earlier one had been.⁶

Although the administrative and disciplinary procedures were, in theory, brought under tighter control, it is apparent that the prominence given to the decree is in response to a perceived failing in the observation of existing custom. Likewise, the emphasis on the sacrament of penance is pre-dated by instructions requiring the priest to make a detailed examination of the penitent. The third of the *Vercelli Homilies*, for example, gives the instruction that

he sceal hine manian, þæt he of þam eahta heafodleahtrum andetnesse do. [ond] se sacerd him sceal synderlice ælcne leahtor genæmnan.⁷

The significance, therefore, is not in the decrees themselves, which had historical precedents, but in the fact that they *were* decrees, written with the full authority of the Church, and cited in diocesan constitutions by the bishops who brought them back to England.⁸ That the decrees survive in many written texts is important, for the later Middle Ages was a period of gradually expanding literacy, in which the primacy of oral

⁶ Cheney, "Legislation of the Medieval English Church," p.198.

⁷ *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, ed. D.G. Scragg (Oxford, 1992), p.75. Several translations from the Latin original exist (*ibid.*, p.70). On the development of the theology of penance, see D.W. Robertson Jr., "The Cultural Tradition of *Handlyng Synne*," *Spec* 22 (1947): 169-172.

⁸ For the dissemination of the Lateran decrees, see Gibbs and Lang, *Bishops and Reform*, pp.94-179 and Cheney, "Legislation of the Medieval English Church," pp.385-417.

communication was gradually displaced by the written word.⁹ Consequently, writing had a profound effect on the nature of proof;¹⁰ in its apparent fixity, it acquired the status of immutable veracity, thereby becoming authoritative. It is true to say, therefore, that

medieval civilization was a literate civilization; the knowledge indispensable to the functioning of medieval society was transmitted in writing: the Bible and its exegesis, statutory laws, and documents of all kinds.¹¹

This is not, of course, to suggest that all could read, but from the late eleventh century to the early fourteenth, literacy amongst laymen, in response to increased bureaucratic demands, was on the increase, at least on a basic, “pragmatic” level.¹² That clerical literacy did not always keep pace was a cause of concern for some contemporary commentators,¹³ but the important point for the present discussion is that the written word had acquired sufficient standing to impart authority by its very physical presence, even to those with minimal (if any) reading skills. This background of canon law enshrined in written documents, addressed to a society in which the written word indicated authority, set the scene for changes in individual religious thought and practice, in which texts would be at the centre of debate.

Of all the written authorities, the Bible was “the authoritative book *par excellence*;”¹⁴ of all words, the Word of God carried the most weight. However, although lay literacy was

⁹ D.H. Green, “Orality and Reading: The State of Research in Medieval Studies,” *Spec* 65 (1990): 268. It is important, however, not to over-simplify this transition, for, as Stock has noted, “the change...was not so much from oral *to* written as from an earlier state, predominantly oral, to various combinations of oral *and* written;” Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy* (Princeton, 1983), p.9.

¹⁰ M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record* (2nd edn. Oxford, 1993), p.186.

¹¹ Franz H. Bäuml, “Varieties and Consequences of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy,” *Spec* 55 (1980): 237.

¹² Parkes has defined three levels of literacy: “that of the professional reader, which is the literacy of the scholar or the professional man of letters; that of the cultivated reader, which is the literacy of recreation; and that of the pragmatic reader, which is the literacy of one who has to read or write in the course of transacting any kind of business.” M.B. Parkes, “The Literacy of the Laity,” in *The Mediaeval World*, ed. David Daiches and Anthony Thorlby (London, 1973), p.555. On the move from pragmatic to cultivated lay literacy, see *ibid.*, pp.557-563.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.226.

¹⁴ A.J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship* (Aldershot, 1984), p.11.

increasing, it was, as has been noted, largely of a pragmatic nature, fulfilling the requirements of everyday living and rarely going further. The Bible, in England, remained largely the province of the clergy, with the first full translation into the vernacular not allowing greater potential access until the later years of the fourteenth century. In the meantime, it was up to the clergy to act as mediators between the Word of the Bible and the laity, whether through preaching, teaching or other pastoral duties.

At the most basic, visual level, a book may be taken as an emblem of the priest's status, giving a tangible presence to the transcendent and absolute will, law and wisdom of God,¹⁵ and transmitting its authority by association.¹⁶ Even without this “prop,” the priest was entrusted with the authority of the Word, and it was his duty to make sure that the laity understood and acted in accordance with it. The tenth Lateran decree had stressed the importance of the appointment of suitable men to preach and hear confession:

generali constitutione sancimus, ut episcopi viros idoneos ad sanctæ prædicationis officium salubriter exequendum assumant, potentes in opere & dermone, qui plebes commisiis, vice ipsorum, cum per se idem nequiverint, solícite visitantes, eas verbo ædificent & exemplo, quibus ipsi, cum indiguerint, congrue necessaria ministrent, ne pro necessariorum defectu compellantur desistere ab incæpto.¹⁷

[We by a general constitution decree that bishops are to choose men effective in action and speech, suitable for executing the office of sacred preaching to advantage, to visit zealously the peoples committed to them in their place when they themselves cannot and edify them by word and example, and they are to furnish these men, when they need them, with what is appropriate and necessary lest for lack of the things necessary they be forced to abandon an undertaking.¹⁸]

The friars, with their “superior pastoral and theological learning,”¹⁹ were most ready to

¹⁵ Jesse M. Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages* (London, 1985), pp.31-32.

¹⁶ Helen Leith Spencer, *English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1993), p.77.

¹⁷ *Concilium Lateranense IV*, in *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* vol.22, ed. Joannes Dominicus Mansi (repr., Graz, 1961), p.998.

¹⁸ Translation from Harry Rothwell (ed.), *English Historical Documents: 1189-1327* (London, 1975), pp.650-651.

¹⁹ Jonathan Hughes, “The Administration of Confession in the Diocese of York in the Fourteenth Century,” in *Studies in Clergy and Ministry in Medieval England*, ed. David Smith (York, 1991), p.88.

respond to this call; indeed, it is a role which they had already begun to carry out under the initiative of their Orders' founders.

It had been shown by the early-thirteenth century - largely by heretics - that there were hearts to be won if only a preacher went out to win them. The way to win them, once you had arrived in the marketplace, was to speak to them in their own language - metaphorically as well as literally, "usefully, about things relevant to them," as the expert said.²⁰

The "expert" was the Dominican master general, Humbert of Romans, who in the mid-thirteenth century composed the tract *De eruditione praedicatorum*, which enumerated "the obligations of a preacher and the general duties which pertain to that office."²¹ It was the Dominicans who were, perhaps, best placed to carry out such activities in England, by virtue of the enthusiastic support offered by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton.²² This support was perhaps due to Langton discerning in their preaching a ready tool for the implementation of the decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council, at which he had been present.²³ Whether or not this is the case, it was Langton who presided over the Council of Oxford in 1222, the year following the Dominicans' arrival, at which the Lateran decrees were first extensively reiterated in the country.

The Dominicans were soon followed by the Franciscans, who brought their own form of spirituality into the country.²⁴ Whereas the Dominicans had been founded upon a need for intellectual persuasion in doctrinal issues, the keynote of the Franciscan calling was emulation. This found its most obvious expression in the Order's poverty, and it may be said

²⁰ Alexander Murray, "Religion Among the Poor in Thirteenth Century France: The Testimony of Humbert de Romans," *Traditio* 30 (1974):287.

²¹ William A. Hinnebusch, *The Early English Friars Preachers* (Rome, 1951), p.289.

²² On the establishing of the Dominicans in England, see David Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England* vol.1 (Cambridge, 1948), pp.163-170.

²³ Gibbs and Lang, *Bishops and Reform*, p.106.

²⁴ On the establishing of the Franciscans in England, see Knowles, *Religious Orders* vol.1, pp.127-145, and Rosalind B. Brooke, *The Coming of the Friars* (London, 1975), pp.109-110.

that

For St. Francis...poverty, which was merely a channel of communication for Dominic, was the end towards which his greatest effort was directed.²⁵

Furthermore, the Franciscans encouraged an affective response to scripture, in which their listeners were brought into a closer, more personal relationship with Christ. St. Francis himself was the prime example, receiving the stigmata in 1224, but the open-hearted giving of oneself to Christ which he represented was preached to all. Indeed, Innocent III had granted preaching authority to Francis in 1210 on condition that his Order avoided matters of doctrine and concentrated upon penitence,²⁶ an emphasis pre-dating the Lateran decrees by five years.

Although himself a scholar, Bonaventura advised his readers to “ask grace, not learning; desire, not understanding; the sigh of prayer, not industry in study” (*interrogam gratiam, non doctrinam; desiderium, non intellectum; gemitum orationis, non studium lectionis*).²⁷ This affective, rather than intellectual, Christianity is a feature of Franciscan poetry. “A Luue Ron” by Thomas of Wales, written in the mid-thirteenth century, provides a fine example:²⁸

A mayde Cristes me bit yorne.
þat ich hire wurche a luue ron.
For hwan heo myhte best ileorne.
to taken. on oper soþ lefmon.
þat treowest were of alle berne.
and best wyte cuþe a freo wymmon.
Ich hire rule nowiht werne.

²⁵ R.W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (London, 1970), p.282.

²⁶ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order, from its Origins to the Year 1517* (Oxford, 1968), p.272.

²⁷ Bonaventura, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, in *Opera omnia*, vol. 5 (Quaracchi, 1891), p.313.

²⁸ “A Luue Ron,” printed in Richard Morris (ed.), *An Old English Miscellany* (London, 1872), pp.93-99. Carleton Brown refers to this as “one of the few English poems of the thirteenth century which was still remembered and imitated as late as the end of the fourteenth century,” Carleton Brown (ed.), *English Lyrics of the Thirteenth Century* (Oxford, 1932), p.198. Regrettably, the poem provides no clue as to the status - whether lay or cloistered - of the “mayde” to whom it is addressed.

ich hire wule teche as ic con.²⁹

Within the argument of the poem, the poet is requested to compose a love song, one of the more worldly entertainments. However, in fulfilling this charge, he subverts the genre, first dismissing worldly love as “vikel. and frakel. and wok. and les,”³⁰ before directing the maiden to the “treowe king.”³¹ Although elevating the spiritual above the physical, the poet's choice of imagery remains resolutely earthly:

He is ricchest mon of londe,
so wide so mon spekep. with muþ.
Alle heo beop to his honde.
est. and west. and norþ. and suþ.
Henri king of Engelsonde.
of him he halt. and to him buhþ.³²

Christ is depicted as being greater than earthly kings, more specifically the contemporary king of England, Henry III,³³ yet he is described in the same terms, by means of which the incarnate Christ, rather than a theological abstract, is evoked.

In closing, the maiden is exhorted to “leorný bute bok vych del” of the poem,³⁴ and to “tech hit oþer maydenes wel.”³⁵ The relationship with Christ to which she is directed should be passed on to others who may benefit,³⁶ for the Christian experience, unlike doctrinal issues, may be passed on, even amongst the laity, without recourse to vocational calling or written authority. At this level, this is uncontroversial, but it nonetheless shows an encouragement towards direct individual devotion - a trend which, by the late fourteenth

²⁹ “A Luue Ron,” ll.1-8.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, l.12.

³¹ *Ibid.*, l.88.

³² *Ibid.*, ll.97-102.

³³ See also *ibid.*, ll.81-82.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, l.196.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, l.198.

³⁶ As the maiden is pressed to learn the book, it may be assumed that the teaching is to be carried out orally.

century, would have consequences very different to those envisaged by the English prelates who welcomed the Fourth Lateran decrees concerning lay piety.

Throughout the thirteenth century and beyond, it becomes less possible to think of Dominicans purely as great schoolmen and Franciscans as exemplars of apostolic poverty, for as well as influencing the laity, the Orders also influenced each other to a considerable extent, thereby eroding many of the more striking initial differences.³⁷ A great attraction to would-be scholars of the mendicant Orders in general was the freedom to study, unhampered by the demands placed upon parish priests, consequently attracting more *litterati* to the Franciscans and leading to a greater concern with dogma, although a literal approach to scripture was still venerated above more complex interpretations.³⁸ Likewise, the affective response to Christ spread outwards from the Franciscans.³⁹ Thus the Friars in general attained a place at the forefront both of studying scripture and also of expounding it to the laity, becoming “the leading teachers, preachers and missionaries of the later Middle Ages,”⁴⁰ although it is commonly asserted that their popularity declined throughout the fourteenth century, to the extent that anti-mendicant writings of this period are “so numerous as to virtually constitute a genre.”⁴¹ However, precisely the opposite is suggested by the granting of gifts and legacies by lay patrons which continued into the fifteenth

³⁷ Richard W. Emery, *The Friars in Medieval France* (London, 1962), pp.2-3, notes that this “weathering” was, to some extent, constrained by the emergence of forceful personalities within the individual Orders, which ensured that each remained distinct.

³⁸ Moorman, *History of the Franciscan Order*, p.274. That the Franciscans produced such scholars as Alexander of Hales, Duns Scotus and William of Ockham is perhaps evidence enough of the Order’s encroachment into what may be considered as the more traditional domain of the Dominicans.

³⁹ See, for example, the various versions of “Man’s Leman on the Rood,” in Brown, *English Lyrics of the Thirteenth Century*, pp.61-64. Of these, Brown suggests that at least one (no. 34) is from a Dominican manuscript (*ibid.* p.xxi).

⁴⁰ Introduction to Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Friar’s, Summoner’s and Pardoner’s Tales from The Canterbury Tales*, ed. N.R. Havely (London, 1975), p.3.

⁴¹ Thomas J. Heffernan, “Sermon Literature,” in *Middle English Prose. A Critical Guide to Major Authors and Genres*, ed. A.S.G. Edwards (New Brunswick, 1984), p.184.

century, along with the foundation of new houses.⁴² Indeed, the volume of anti-mendicant writing suggests in itself that the friars' detractors were deeply concerned by the continued influence upon the laity. It is perhaps most accurate to conclude that late fourteenth-century attitudes towards friars were diffuse:

coupling devotion with suspicion, reverence with derision. But they converged in associating a magisterial efficacy to all that the friars did. Clearly the mendicants held a firm and in many ways a positive place in the popular imagination.⁴³

Whatever the balance of these mixed feelings, the influence of the friars was certainly felt throughout the Church as they spearheaded what may be termed "the preaching revival," which had been gathering momentum since the early thirteenth century.⁴⁴

Throughout the Middle Ages, Latin remained as the language of learning, of the Church and of the law,⁴⁵ whilst French slowly gave way to English as the language of business and social intercourse.⁴⁶ It is unsurprising, therefore, that literature intended for

⁴² Moorman, *History of the Franciscan Order*, p.514, and Sylvia L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London* (Michigan, 1962), pp.183 & 190. It should be noted, however, that the foundation of new houses in England became less frequent from the late fourteenth century, in contrast with the continued expansion taking place in France, although any conclusions drawn from this should be tempered by consideration of relative sizes of population and distribution of mendicant houses. See Emery, *Friars in Medieval France*, p.22.

⁴³ Carolly Erickson, "The Fourteenth-Century Franciscans and their Critics. II - Poverty, Jurisdiction, and Internal Change," *Franciscan Studies* 36 (1976): 147.

⁴⁴ D.L. d'Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars* (Oxford, 1985), pp.13-28.

⁴⁵ As Rigg has noted, Latin was used as a literary medium throughout the fourteenth century, but the period produced no major Latin writers, with the possible exception of Gower, as the English vernacular grew in status as the language of literature: A.G. Rigg, *A History of Anglo-Latin Literature: 1066-1422* (Cambridge, 1992), p.242. Regarding Gower, Hudson has noted that the early Latin *Vox Clamantis* contains harsher criticism of the Church than the later (predominantly) English *Confessio Amantis*: Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford, 1988), pp.408-410. Whilst this later circumspection may well reflect, as Hudson suggests, an awareness of the increased danger of voicing such criticism, it is possible that at the same time Gower considered the discussion of certain matters to be inappropriate in the less learned vernacular.

⁴⁶ The gradual rise of the English language between 1200 and 1500 is traced in Albert C. Baugh, *A History of the English Language* (New York, 1957), pp.150-188. This is seen as occurring at different rates for the spoken word and the languages of written record and literature, but it may broadly be claimed that "in the fourteenth century English won its way back into universal use, and in the fifteenth century French all but disappeared" (pp.150-151). It should be remembered, however, that for the English laity below the aristocracy, English would be the primary - indeed, probably only - language used. See R.A. Lodge, "Language Attitudes and Linguistic Norms in France and England in the Thirteenth Century," in *Thirteenth Century England*, ed. P.R. Coss and S.D. Lloyd (Woodbridge, 1992), p.79 and references cited therein. The complexity of the relationship between English, French and Latin in the late fourteenth century is discussed in W. Rothwell, "The Trilingual

clerical use most frequently tends to be in Latin, whether it be instructional material or sermon collections.⁴⁷ However, in order to be of use to the laity, it was necessary that preaching and instruction should be carried out “*in vulgari*,” a fact made explicit by Archbishop Richard Fitzralph in his (Latin) sermon collection.⁴⁸

That most pastoral and devotional literature survives in Latin is no mere accident, but accurately reflects the original predominance of Latin works. This is evinced by the manual *Speculum sacerdotale*, a fifteenth-century English collection.⁴⁹ Although written in the vernacular, the author's introduction specifically addresses “serteyne prestes,” and defines his work as being

of the solempnytees of alle seyntes the whiche schulden worshipfully eche
Sonneday be schewid un-to youre peple that God may be glorified in youre
chirches...⁵⁰

There is no doubt that it is intended for a clerical audience, to aid their pastoral duties, and the novelty of its composition in English is acknowledged by the author himself, who states that such material is more generally written “in Latin or Romaine tonge.”⁵¹ It is worthy of note, however, that the text, although predominantly in English, more often cites scripture in Latin, thereby according greater status to its untranslated (and, it could be argued,

England of Geoffrey Chaucer,” *Spec* (forthcoming): 45-67.

⁴⁷ Spencer, *English Preaching*, p.15.

⁴⁸ G.R. Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England* (New York, 1965), p.225. Hudson has recently expressed surprise at the lack of specific direction on a Latin Wycliffite sermon collection for their translation for use: Anne Hudson, ““Springing Cockel in our Clene Corn’: Lollard Preaching in England around 1400,” in *Christendom and its Discontents: Exclusion, Persecution, and Rebellion, 1000-1500*, ed. Scott L. Waugh and Peter D. Diehl (Cambridge, 1996), p.141. In spite of this lack, however, we may surely assume that a Lollard preacher, of all people, would have translated the material in order to be understood by his audience. Indeed, von Nolcken, in her discussion of this group, has concluded that “the Latin sermons are clearly intended as a storehouse of useful preaching material rather than to be delivered much as they stand:” see Christina von Nolcken, “An Unremarked Group of Wycliffite Sermons in Latin,” *MP* 83 (1986): 238.

⁴⁹ *Speculum sacerdotale*, ed. Edward H. Weatherly (repr. New York, 1971). On dating, see p.XV.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.2-3.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.3.

untranslatable) authority.

It has been said that “a sentence that seems to need no interpretation is already the product of one,”⁵² and this is particularly appropriate when applied to the Latin quotations within this English text, as this lack of translation in itself implies a higher register. What, however, is one to make of this situation when it is inverted; when English verses or phrases occur in Latin texts?

As has been stated above, most texts come down to us in their written form in Latin, although it is reasonable to assume that the vernacular would be employed when instructing or preaching to the laity. It is generally assumed that Latin would be used for addressing a clerical audience,⁵³ although the question of how much the two languages may have intermingled within sermons is still not fully resolved.⁵⁴ John of Wales, in his *Ars praedicandi*, suggested that one suitable method for introducing the protheme of a sermon is “aliquod vulgare proverbium,”⁵⁵ but in works such as *Fasciculus morum* these snatches of vernacular verse occur at less rigidly-defined intervals.⁵⁶ It has been suggested that the function of verses within a prose text fulfilled one of two purposes:

to assist the preacher, by recalling to his mind the chief divisions of his theme, as he progresses...(or) to do a kindred work for the listeners, especially if the quotation takes the form of a popular rhyming summary of the day.⁵⁷

An example of this may be found in *Fasciculus morum*, where is given the “antiquum

⁵² Stanley E. Fish, “Normal Circumstances, Literal Language, Direct Speech Acts, the Ordinary, the Everyday, the Obvious, What Goes Without Saying, and Other Special Cases,” *Critical Inquiry* 4 (1978): 637.

⁵³ Owst, *Preaching*, p.223.

⁵⁴ Siegfried Wenzel, *Verses in Sermons. Fasciculus morum and its Middle English Poems* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1978), p.89.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.96.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.76 ff. *Fasciculus morum*, probably composed shortly after 1300 and of Franciscan authorship (see *ibid.* pp.26-34), was a widely-circulated preacher’s handbook, of which twenty eight known copies survive, the latest of which have been dated as being of the late fifteenth century. For manuscript details and textual history, see introduction to *Fasciculus morum*, ed. Siegfried Wenzel (London, 1989), pp.1-23.

⁵⁷ Owst, *Preaching* p.272.

proverbium:”

The lade dame Fortune is bothe frende and foo.
Of pore hoe maketh riche and ryche of pore also.
Hee turneth woo to wele and wele also to woo.
Ne trust noght to his word, þe whele turneth so.⁵⁸

The text shifts into the vernacular for this piece of proverbial wisdom, and it has been said that the frequent occurrence of such examples from as early as the thirteenth century onwards indicates that they “clearly enjoyed an authority on a par with scriptural and patristic quotations.”⁵⁹ There is, indeed, a suggestion in its being introduced as an ancient proverb that its antiquity denotes wisdom and, therefore, authority.

The issue, however, is far from simple, for the verse quoted above almost immediately follows a less clear-cut example. The writer concludes his *exemplum* of Ulfrid, “de quo sic metrice dicitur versus:”

Ulfridus clamidem quam suscepit per Attridem
Servavit pridem, casus dedit, abstulit idem.

þat mantell þe kyng to Vlfride lente,
With hap hit come, with hap hit wente.⁶⁰

Although antiquity is not explicitly claimed, the verse introduced as a familiar one. Yet in this instance English is used merely in translation of the given Latin. This pattern is repeated throughout the text, sometimes even with “Anglice sic” or simply “Anglice” explicitly announcing the translation,⁶¹ thereby undermining the notion of these verses representing the authority of a body of traditional vernacular wisdom.

It is possible that if the text was to be preached in Latin, these insertions would stand out as memorable summaries of salient points, in a manner which has been likened to

⁵⁸ *Fasciculus morum*, pp.330-332.

⁵⁹ Wenzel, *Verses in Sermons*, p.96.

⁶⁰ *Fasciculus morum*, p.330.

⁶¹ See, for example, *ibid.*, pp.212, 316 & 376.

modern advertising jingles.⁶² Another explanation may be that the text was designed to be preached in either Latin or English, and an appropriate rendering of the verse was given for each. What is important, however, is that both Latin and vernacular verses are accorded almost equal weight. I say “almost,” as whenever alternatives are provided, the Latin is always given first, evincing the higher status which one would expect. It is significant, nonetheless, that whilst Latin remains the language of authoritative record, the vernacular has found a niche for itself in a hierarchy of written language which, although accorded a lower status, attains a certain degree of authority by its very inclusion.⁶³

A more extended form of this hierarchy may be seen at work in the early fourteenth-century *Contes Moralises* of the Franciscan Nicholas Bozon.⁶⁴ Writing in England shortly before 1320,

Il s'adressent bien plutôt à la classe moyenne, à des gens qui savaient l'anglais de naissance, - puisque l'auteur cite souvent des proverbes ou des phrases en cette langue, - mais qui avaient appris plus ou moins le français et considéraient cette langue comme plus noble, et prenant place, dans l'ordre des préséances, immédiatement après le latin.⁶⁵

Although writing predominantly in the French vernacular, which held greater sway with the English nobility until late in the medieval period,⁶⁶ and generally eschewing comment upon matters of theological import, Bozon frequently cites biblical authorities in Latin. Also, the

⁶² Siegfried Wenzel, *Preachers, Poets, and the Early English Lyric* (Princeton, 1986), p.116.

⁶³ Of English phrases which are introduced by “Anglice,” but follow no Latin model, Wenzel comments that they “are indeed fragments of popular songs. Moreover, it can be reasonably shown how the thought or theme developed in the sermon brought such a song to the preacher's or scribe's mind, who then jotted it down as an illustrative proof text or message verse:” *ibid.*, p.224.

⁶⁴ For a review of the little that is known of Bozon's career, see the introduction to Nicholas Bozon, *Nine Verse Sermons by Nicholas Bozon. The Art of an Anglo-Norman Poet and Preacher*, ed. Brian J. Levy.(Oxford, 1981), pp.1-4.

⁶⁵ Introduction to Nicole Bozon, *Les Contes Moralises*, ed. Lucy Toulmin Smith and Paul Meyer (repr. Paris, 1968), pp.LIV-LV.

⁶⁶ In examining the contents of aristocratic wills of the late fourteenth century, Scattergood finds that books in French greatly outnumber those written in English. V.J. Scattergood, “Literary Culture at the Court of Richard II,” in *English Court Culture in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. V.J. Scattergood and J.W. Sherborne (London, 1983), pp.29-43.

individual *Contes* are invariably preceded by a Latin rubric, which has the effect of raising the status of the work itself; the points are made in the authoritative language of Latin before they are elaborated in the French vernacular. As has been noted above, whilst writing for a French-speaking English audience, Bozon occasionally introduces lines of English, often in the form of an epigrammatic couplet.⁶⁷ These snatches of English, like the excerpts in *Fasciculus morum*, are frequently introduced as synopses of arguments rendered “en engleys,” and are proverbial in nature, such as:

Trendle the appel nevere so far he conyes fro what tree he cam.⁶⁸

or:

He yat hadd inou to help him self wital,
Sithen he ne wold, I ne wile ne I ne schal.⁶⁹

The relatively infrequent use of English suggests that it had a low linguistic status amongst his audience.⁷⁰ However, a slight anomaly in the language of no.76, “*Contra ypocrisim pretendentes*,” suggests that in actuality the situation is not so clear-cut:

Un autre nature est de ceo verm qe est appellé en latyn eruke et en engleiz
glouworm.⁷¹

The necessity of introducing this English translation would appear to suggest that this, in fact, was the language that his audience would most clearly understand. The Latin word

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, nos. 5, 14, 28, 96 & 128. Others containing English words or phrases are nos. 3, 17, 34, 55, 76, 88 & 122. All Bozon’s extant, attributable works employ French as their main language, whilst a knowledge of Latin and English is displayed throughout. See Bozon, *Nine Verse Sermons*, p.2.

⁶⁸ Bozon, *Contes Moralises*, p.23, no.17.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.44, no.28.

⁷⁰ Over 130 of the *Contes* contain no English. It should perhaps be noted that *Fasciculus morum* contains the occasional word or two in French. However, rather than being indicative of linguistic status, such sparse usage would suggest that these are words or phrases which had become common currency amongst English speakers. See, for example, *Fasciculus morum*, pp.388 & 516, where the phrases “iambe leue” and “le hasard” are employed in a colloquial fashion.

⁷¹ Bozon, *Contes Moralises*, p.95, no.76.

which he finds in the *De proprietatibus rerum* of Bartholomæus Anglicus,⁷² a frequent source for his natural history *exempla*, is *eruca*. In translating this, however, he appears to be lost for a French equivalent, and consequently has recourse to the English “*glouworm*.”⁷³ It may be inferred from this example that just as Latin was considered the appropriate language of higher learning, so English, by its very nature as the mother tongue, was in certain situations the only language which could express particular points of elementary lore. This is particularly evident in this tri-lingual example, as it shows an instance in which there is a choice of possible vernacular languages, in which a problem of expression may only be resolved in the language of the “lowest common denominator.”

This was perhaps recognised by the author of the Auchinleck Ms. version of the poem *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, who states that:

Riȝt is þat Inglische vnderstond
 Þat was born in Ingland.
 Freynsche vse þis gentil man
 Ac euerich Inglische Inglische can,
 Mani noble ich haue yseiȝe
 Þat no Freynsche coupe seye.⁷⁴

Probably writing within one or two decades of Bozon,⁷⁵ it is apparent that this writer recognises that in spite of French being the accepted language of romance, his audience is most likely to be fluent only in English. However, although less widely understood, it is possible that the use of French as a competing vernacular slowed the rise in status of

⁷² See Bartholomæus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things*, trans. John Trevisa, ed. M.C. Seymour *et al*, vol.2 (Oxford, 1975), pp.1198-1199.

⁷³ It is of course possible that Bozon knows the French word, but considers it unlikely that his English audience would necessarily understand such a word of limited usage. However, I feel that the complete absence of a French translation renders this less likely.

⁷⁴ *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, ed. O.D. Macrae-Gibson. Vol.1, (London, 1973), pp.3-5.

⁷⁵ For dating of the manuscript, see the introduction to *Sir Orfeo*, ed. A.J. Bliss, (Oxford, 1954), pp.ix-x, wherein it is concluded that “it may confidently be dated about 1330.”

English.⁷⁶

In this, England may be seen as lagging behind Italy, where Dante's statement of the higher "nobility" of Latin in *Convivio* 1.5 was reversed in *De vulgari eloquentia*,⁷⁷ in which it is argued that the vernacular is "nobler" than Latin.⁷⁸ This, of course, does not imply "the non-nobility of Latin,"⁷⁹ but nonetheless suggests an awareness of the possibility of inverting the hierarchy as found in England during the same period.⁸⁰ That this most direct statement of the relative merits of the vernacular and Latin received scant attention until long after his death should be noted,⁸¹ but even in his most famous work, *The Divine Comedy*, the vernacular is accorded an implicit parity with Latin, as the poet is accepted as an equal

⁷⁶ It must be remembered that a lasting legacy of the Norman Conquest was the cultural prestige of French which continued well into the fourteenth century, so that it could be complained that "vplondisshe men wil likne hym self to gentil men, and fondeþ wiþ greet besynesse for to speke Frensche, for to be i-tolde of:" Ranulf Higden, *Polychronicon*, trans. John Trevisa, ed. Churchill Babington, vol.2 (repr. London, 1964), p.159. See also Lodge, "Language Attitudes and Linguistic Norms," p.82; Barbara M.H. Strang, *A History of English* (London, 1970), pp.215-220. Indeed, the decision by Gower in the late fourteenth century to compose major works in both English and French vernaculars, as well as in Latin, may be taken as indicative of the gradual nature of this change in the relative status of languages within the court circles for which he was writing, and it was not until the early fifteenth century that French became "practically non-existent as a means of communication of any of the circles of English Society, with the exception of the lawyers:" Rolf Berndt, "The Period of the Final Decline of French in Medieval England (Fourteenth and Early Fifteenth Centuries)," *ZAA* 20 (1972): 363.

⁷⁷ Dante Alighieri, *The Convivio*, trans. Philip H. Wicksteed (London, 1903), p.25. Indeed, in *La vita nuova*, Dante writes of the vernacular's greater suitability solely "for the purpose of writing of love:" Dante Alighieri, *La vita nuova*, trans. Barbara Reynolds (London, 1969), p.73.

⁷⁸ Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, in *A Translation of the Latin Works of Dante Alighieri*, (repr. New York, 1969), p.4.

⁷⁹ Cecil Grayson, "'Nobilior est vulgaris': Latin and Vernacular in Dante's Thought," in *Centenary Essays on Dante*, ed. Oxford Dante Society (Oxford, 1965), p.76. See also J. Cremona, "Dante's Views on Language," in *The Mind of Dante*, ed. U. Limentani (Cambridge, 1965), pp.138-162. It must, of course, be remembered that Dante wrote this treatise in Latin, thereby acknowledging the paradoxical need to argue for the nobility of the vernacular in the consensually noble language of Latin. As the work remained incomplete, however, it is impossible to know Dante's final word on this issue which occupied him throughout his life.

⁸⁰ This hierarchy may be observed in operation in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, in which the predominantly English body of the poem is provided with an academic-style Latin commentary, which effectively lends authority to the work. Gower's self-authorizing is discussed in A.J. Minnis, "De Vulgari Auctoritate: Chaucer, Gower and the Men of Great Authority," in *Chaucer and Gower: Difference, Mutuality, Exchange*, ed. R.F. Yeager (Victoria, 1991), pp.51-66.

⁸¹ Dante, *Latin Works*, p.116. Boccaccio, in his *Life of Dante*, mentions it only briefly as an unfinished, or partially lost, work, "in which he intended to give instructions to whoever wanted them in the writing of poetry:" Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Life of Dante*, trans. Vincenzo Zin Bollettino, (London, 1990), p.54.

amongst the Poets in Limbo:

Greater honour still they deigned to grant me:
they welcomed me as one of their own group.⁸²

By the late fourteenth century, however, John Trevisa, in translating and commenting upon Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon*, could reflect upon the mixed blessing of the fall of French from common usage in England:

now, the 3ere of oure Lorde a þowsand þre hundred and foure score and fyue, and of þe secounde kyng Richard after þe conquest nyne, in alle þe gramere scoles of Engelond, children leueþ Frensche and construeþ and lerneþ an Englische, and haueþ þerby auauntage in oon side and disauauntage in anoþer side; here auauntage is, þat þey lerneþ her gramer in lasse tyme þan children were i-woned to doo; disauauntage is þat now children of gramer scole conneþ na more Frensche þan can hir lift heele, and þat is harme for hem and þey schulle passe þe see and trauaille in straunge landes and in many oþer places.⁸³

This short passage contains a number of pertinent points. The first, and most obvious, is that English has supplanted French as the language of instruction in the grammar schools.⁸⁴ Furthermore, in stating that this has speeded up the learning process, it is apparent that English had already in the past been the most readily understood vernacular, with the learning of French providing further demands upon pupils. The stated disadvantages regarding travel shows a distinct acceptance of a division between English as the native vernacular and French as a foreign language; a language, furthermore, the usefulness of which was not confined to France alone, but extended to “many oþer places,” due to its status as “the most prestigious ‘vulgar tongue’ in Europe.”⁸⁵ Finally, although English is being considered in this passage as a means towards learning the scholarly language of Latin,

⁸² Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy. Vol. I, Inferno*, trans. Mark Musa (revised. London, 1984), Canto 4, ll.100-101. Such emphasis draws attention to the novelty of the idea.

⁸³ Higden, *Polychronicon*, p.161.

⁸⁴ The move towards the teaching of Latin in English, rather than in French, was instigated by John of Cornwall, who taught at Oxford from 1344 to 1349. Brother Bonaventure, “The Teaching of Latin in Later Medieval England,” *MS 23* (1961): 4. Indeed, by 1380 it had become necessary for the statutes of Oxford University to insist upon the use of both French and English in Latin translation, “ne illa lingua Gallica penitus sit omissa.” *Statuta antiqua universitatis Oxoniensis*, ed. S. Gibson (Oxford, 1931), p.171.

⁸⁵ Lodge, “Language Attitudes and Linguistic Norms,” p.78.

the work in which it is contained is itself a translation from Latin into English. The issue of translation will be considered in greater detail later,⁸⁶ but this translation into a specifically English vernacular appears to imply a parity of linguistic status for textual dissemination.

It may be seen, therefore, that throughout the fourteenth century, the sustained programme of vernacular religious instruction spearheaded by the friars coincided with the growing status of the English language.

Writing of the growth of literature in the English vernacular, Coleman has observed that

The blossoming of English poetry and prose in the fourteenth century is most easily intelligible...as the reflection of a changing social structure and its changing ideals: a broadening of the middle range of society, its greater participation in government and its increasing demand for a literature read for information, for pleasure and for spiritual edification.⁸⁷

As the pragmatic literacy of business and bureaucracy developed into more sophisticated reading practices, so the demand for literature increased. The Church's zeal for lay instruction inevitably led to attempts to channel these emerging literary tastes into purely spiritual directions. The author of the *Speculum vitae*, for example, begins by informing his audience that he

wil make no vayn spekyng
Of dedis of armes ne of amours
As done mynstrels and gestours
that makyn spekyng in many place
Of Octavyan and Isambrace
and of many other gestis
and namely when thei come to festis
Ne of the life of Bevis of Hamtoun
That was a knyght of grete renoun
Ne of Gy of warwick...⁸⁸

The listener or reader is addressed in terms of romance in order to introduce a spiritual

⁸⁶ See chapter Seven.

⁸⁷ Janet Coleman, *English Literature in History, 1350-1400. Medieval Readers and Writers* (London, 1981), p.24.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, p.69. There is no complete printed edition of the *Speculum vitae*.

message, in an attempt to reach those who would “leve fablesse rathyr than the gospels,”⁸⁹ and lead them on to higher concerns. This may be seen as a less subtle adaptation of the strategy discussed earlier in the poem “A Luue Ron,” where the spiritual is reached through an earthly channel.

Indeed, the use of secular interests as a foundation for religious didacticism is a common and effective strategy. It has been noted above that the increased demand for all varieties of literature in the later fourteenth century was primarily linked to “a broadening of the middle range of society,” and it was this middle range, the free citizen involved in the emergent money economy, to whom the friars primarily addressed their preaching.

With origins firmly associated with the rejection of wealth, the notion of apostolic poverty was central to Franciscan ideology and only slightly less important to the Dominicans.⁹⁰ These ideals they took into the urban centres of commerce, actively confronting the effects of social economics upon spiritual issues. It was almost inevitable, therefore, that the language which they employed should be “heavily impregnated with a market-place vocabulary.”⁹¹ Again, this demonstrates a conscious application of appropriate material concerns to address a specific social group, perhaps the most extreme example of which is the commonplace notion of Christ’s purchasing of Man’s salvation upon the cross. A simple expression of this is found in a verse from the Franciscan John Grimstone's Commonplace Book:

Loue is my pes,

⁸⁹ Spencer, *English Preaching*, p.91.

⁹⁰ St. Francis himself had turned his back upon his up-bringing as a wealthy cloth merchant's son, whilst the Dominicans had been founded in response to the failure of a Cistercian mission to reconvert the Cathars - a mission which had failed, it was claimed, as a result of the material splendour of the missionaries; Barbara H. Rosenwein and Lester K. Little, “Social Meaning in the Monastic and Mendicant Spiritualities,” *Past and Present* 63 (May 1974): 24.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.23. This issue is further discussed by D’Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars*, pp.207-216. See also Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (London, 1978), pp.200-202.

For loue i ches,
Man to by en dere.⁹²

All such strategies may, perhaps, be considered as addressing the citizen in order to move the Christian, and it is worth pausing to consider this dual nature - social and spiritual - of the preacher's lay audience, a notion which may be traced back to Aristotle, who stated that "the virtue of the good citizen and the virtue of the good man cannot always be the same."⁹³ When, in the thirteenth century, the works of the pagan philosopher were assimilated into Christian thought, this distinction was again stressed; the citizen, like the state, is a product of nature, whilst the moral being is supra-natural, a product of Grace. The two are related, for "Grace does not do away with nature but perfects it,"⁹⁴ but the division is marked nonetheless.

The Augustinian conception of the earthly city, founded by Cain as a consequence of the Fall,⁹⁵ in opposition to the City of God, had been largely superseded by the notion of two distinct powers, both derived ultimately from God.⁹⁶ Nonetheless, the Church saw as its duty the perfection of the nature of the citizen, as the spiritual was still considered to have the higher value. However, clerics themselves were only human and, therefore, subject to this dual nature, so it is perhaps inevitable that in such intimate connections with secular society, they should find the worldly citizen within themselves subject to temptation. Although this

⁹² Carleton Brown (ed.), *Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford, 1952), p.84. For provenance, see *ibid.*, pp.xvi-xix.

⁹³ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (repr. London, 1959), p.107.

⁹⁴ Aquinas, quoted in Walter Ullmann, *A History of Political Thought: The Middle Ages* (London, 1965), p.182.

⁹⁵ Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Gerald G. Walsh and Grace Monahan, vol.2 (New York, 1952), pp.413-415. For a discussion of this issue, see John Neville Figgis, *The Political Aspects of S. Augustine's "City of God,"* (Gloucester, Mass., 1963), pp.14 ff.

⁹⁶ Aquinas, *Selected Political Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. A.P. D'Entrèves, trans. J.G. Dawson (Oxford, 1959), p.187. This is not to say, however, that the Augustinian conception of the City of Man had been completely abandoned. See Alexandra F. Johnston, "Evil in the Towneley Cycle," in *Evil on the Medieval Stage*, ed. Meg Twycross (Lancaster, 1992), pp.96-102, for an instance of the application of the Augustinian model in the fifteenth century.

is true of all classes of clerics, it is most marked, or at least most remarked upon, in the case of the friars.

As early as 1250, less than thirty years after the arrival of the Order in England, the Dominican prior provincial was penanced for extravagance in building,⁹⁷ and it has been suggested that the Order's close association with the royal household inevitably led to corruption.⁹⁸ Although it may be true to say that

While the royal friendship often brought disinterested and honourable diplomatists into medieval politics, it also conduced to the insinuation of the worldly minded and even of charlatans into the Order, and perhaps this...contributed to the waning sympathies and enthusiasm of the people towards friars during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries,⁹⁹

these exceptions should not be over-stressed.¹⁰⁰ It is still possible, however, that a visible minority could indeed prejudice public opinion. As for the Franciscans, St. Francis himself had found occasion to voice concern over the decline in standards which had occurred during his lifetime.¹⁰¹

The extent to which the friars in general deviated from their professed ideals must surely have been exaggerated by comparison with the loftiness of these ideals; the friars had further to fall, as it were, for, as Erickson has noted:

By 1400, money and property had become an established fixture of Franciscan life, and an appropriate object of criticism to those who unfavourably compared the fourteenth-century Minorites to their predecessors of the early thirteenth.¹⁰²

Furthermore, the friars' mendicant lifestyle made them particularly prominent in the

⁹⁷ Knowles, *Religious Orders in England*, p.166.

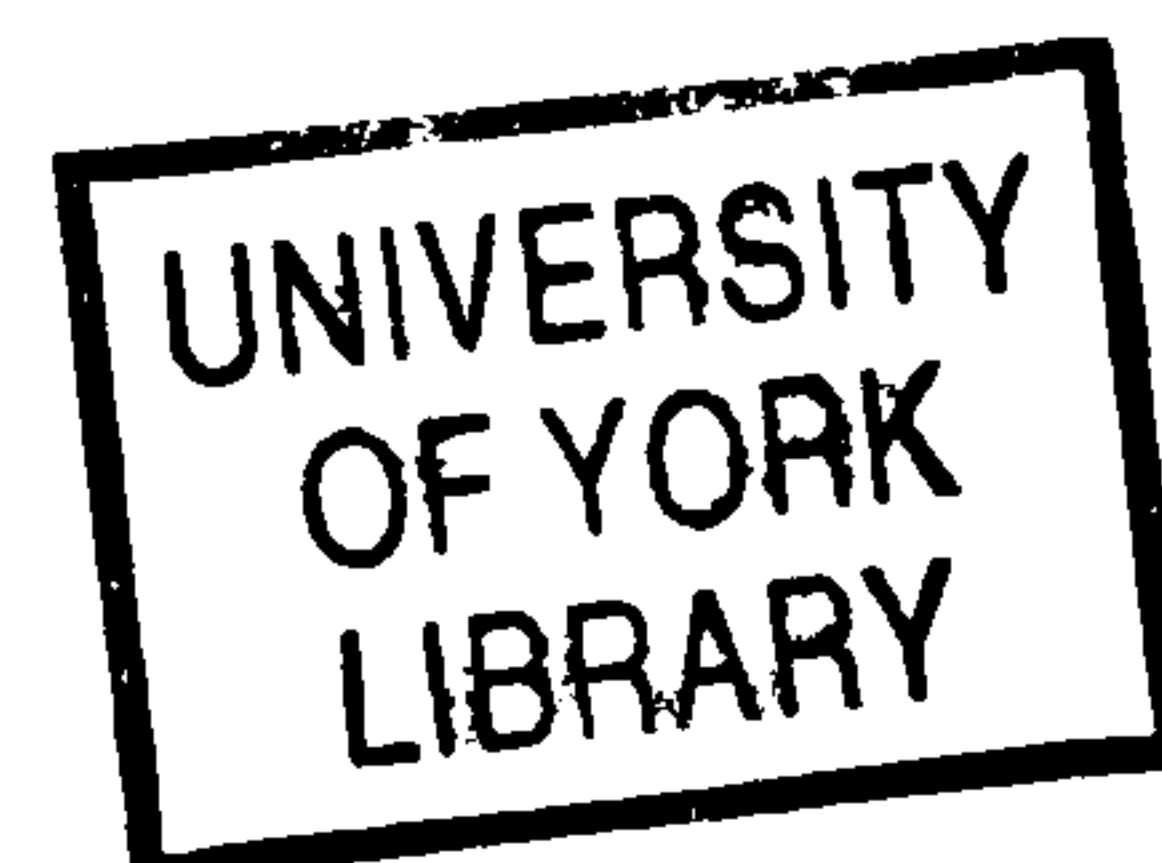
⁹⁸ For this argument, see Hinnebusch, *Early English Friars Preachers*, pp.461-462.

⁹⁹ R.D. Clarke, "Some Secular Activities of the English Dominicans During the Reigns of Edward I, Edward II, and Edward III: 1272-1377" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University College, London, 1930), p.60.

¹⁰⁰ Hinnebusch, for example, in quoting Clarke, omits to mention the "disinterested and honourable diplomatists," who very possibly constituted the norm.

¹⁰¹ Little, *Religious Poverty*, p.197.

¹⁰² Erickson, "Fourteenth-Century Franciscans and their Critics. II," p.117.



medieval scene, for by their programme of serving God by serving the spiritual needs of the community:

Preaching, administering the sacraments, conducting their own churches and even - an especial source of friction - their own cemeteries, the friars made an impact far greater than their more cloistered predecessors.¹⁰³

Indeed, in the eyes of their critics, they were all too prominent, being seen as “ronners ouer cuntreys,”¹⁰⁴ seducing the laity away from their parish priests in order to indulge their avarice and immorality.¹⁰⁵

That there were abuses within the Church cannot be denied, but it must also be remembered that the Church itself continued to strive to correct such abuses: as Pantin has observed, “the one failing that cannot be charged against the fourteenth-century English Church is that of complacency.”¹⁰⁶ What is important, however, is that it was this same publicly imperfect institution that was transmitting religious precepts to the laity, and it was doing so in a vernacular laced with temporal metaphor. In broadening the scope of lay religious understanding, encouraging a direct, affective religious experience, and promoting the spiritual self-awareness necessary for thorough confession, the Church had unwittingly empowered the “new and cantankerous type of educated or half-educated laity.”¹⁰⁷

It has been said that the “rise of the devout layman” was “one of the most important

¹⁰³ Emery, *Friars in Medieval France*, p.5.

¹⁰⁴ D.M. Grisdale (ed.), *Three Middle English Sermons from the Worcester Chapter Manuscript F.10*. (Leeds, 1939), p.60.

¹⁰⁵ A typical gathering of antifraternial criticisms may be found in the fifteenth-century “Song Against the Friars,” in which the narrator, in the persona of a former member of one of the Orders, inveighs against the avarice and immorality he had found therein, closing with the prayer, “Let never man after me have wille for to make him frere.” The poem is printed in Thomas Wright (ed.), *Political Poems and Songs* vol.1 (reprint, London, 1965), pp.263-268.

¹⁰⁶ Pantin, *English Church*, p.236.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.161.

phenomena of the middle ages,”¹⁰⁸ and this is particularly so in conjunction with a general awareness of the fallibility of the clergy and increased lay access to devotional materials in the “mother tongue.” In the present thesis I shall, using the example of Langland’s *Piers Plowman* as a case study, investigate the consequences which the rendering of complex doctrinal issues into the vernacular had for the stability of the Church in England. First, I shall address the dispersal of traditionally clerical discourse to the laity, by which process the fixed boundaries between clerical and lay audiences became eroded. Secondly, I shall evaluate the orthodoxy of Langland’s reformism when judged by the internal arguments of *Piers Plowman* itself, before turning to the manner in which the anticlerical elements of the work were appropriated, once they had transgressed beyond Langland’s intended audience, with inevitably antisacerdotal implications. The ways in which *Piers Plowman* was used by subsequent writers will be examined in detail in both the Lollard *Pierce the Ploughman’s Crede* and the non-heterodox *Canterbury Tales*, and more generally in a range of works from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, in order to illustrate the malleability of concepts when expressed in the “unruly” English vernacular. In closing, I shall turn to attempts made by the Church to reassert its dominion over the religious life of the laity in a period when, for all practical purposes, the distinction between the devout layman and the inadequate cleric, both crossing the division between the earthly city and the City of God, ceased to be a rigid boundary of authority.

This problem of authority is discernable as the guiding principle behind the opening lines of a late fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century sermon:

I rede in haly wryte, I sey noght þat I red in ouddie, noyþer in oras. Vor þe last tyme þat I was her ich was blamyd of som men word, be-cause þat I began my sermon wyt a poysy. And ter-vorn, I say þat I red in haly wryt, in þe secund book of haly wryt, þat I suppoise be sufficiant inowgh of auctoritee...¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.253.

¹⁰⁹ Grisdale, *Three Middle English Sermons*, p.22.

That the Bible is the ultimate authority has been noted above: what is significant here is that the scriptural quote from St. Paul is given “in englice tong to your undirstondyng.”¹¹⁰ Even more significant, however, is that this early fifteenth-century preacher should have to apologise for what his audience have obviously censured as a previous failing: in this instance it is they who have demanded that he make “no vayn spekyng.”¹¹¹ Although his preaching status is nominally respected, the authority which he may claim is by consent of his audience; it is his business to speak the words, but they are, in effect, the property of his audience's common expectation. Scripture had effectively passed into the hands of the laity, and by the late fourteenth century had done so in the very physical sense of finding its way into the written vernacular:

Silent reading opened new horizons for those who mastered it...It made possible a more personal form of piety, a more private devotion, a relation with the sacred not subject to the discipline and mediation of the Church.¹¹²

With the benefit of hindsight, the decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council may perhaps be seen as an unwitting monument to the on-going process which was inexorably undermining the Church's monopoly over the religious life of the individual. The laity knew too much to accept the Church as it stood, and by the late fourteenth century had the means to join their voices to those within the Church itself as they called for reform. Both clergy and laity felt that they possessed the authority to make these complaints, and the obvious language in which to do so was the newly-elevated English vernacular. Consequently, Chaucer's Friar, with a vested interest in maintaining the *status quo*, had every reason to desire the silencing of the raised lay voice.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.22.

¹¹¹ See p.22 above.

¹¹² Roger Chartier, “The Practical Impact of Writing,” in *A History of Private Life. Vol.3, Passions of the Renaissance*, ed. Roger Chartier, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (London, 1989), p.125.

CHAPTER 2

LANGLAND'S INTENDED AUDIENCE AND THE TRANSGRESSION OF AUDIENCE BOUNDARIES IN *PIERS PLOWMAN*

There can be few works in English literature as enigmatic as Langland's *Piers Plowman*. The difficulty in reaching a consensus of interpretation is attested by the vast corpus of scholarship which has grown up around the poem. However, the modern reader may take heart by considering the works of what I shall, in an admittedly casual fashion, term the "*Piers Plowman* tradition,"¹ which reveal an interpretative contest almost as old as the poem itself. A consideration of this contest may be used to illuminate the problems generated by the production of vernacular works concerning issues at the very heart of the Church in the social context discussed in chapter One, but before turning to the "*Piers Plowman* tradition" it is, of course, necessary to address certain fundamental questions raised by the poem itself. What type of literature is it? From whence do the central allegorical images arise? For whom was it written?

In the previous chapter, I touched briefly upon the conflict between romance and religious literature, and the attempts made by didactic writers to reach audiences through the adoption of an approach based firmly upon secular interests.² The reasons for addressing a specifically lay audience in this way this way are clearly stated by Robert Mannyng of

¹ The term "*Piers Plowman* tradition" was, to my knowledge, first employed by David Lawton in his article "Lollardy and the *Piers Plowman* Tradition," *MLR* 76 (1981): 780-793, and has recently been comprehensively discussed in Helen Barr, *Signes and Sothe: Language in the Piers Plowman Tradition* (Cambridge, 1994), pp.1-22. As Barr has noted, this is a "contested classification" (*ibid.*, p.2), so I shall state at the outset that I use the term to encompass not only those works so designated by Barr - *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*, *Richard the Redeless*, *Mum and the Sothsegger* and *The Crowned King* - but also *The Plowman's Tale* (included by Lawton) and, indeed, any work which displays a considered authorial response to *Piers Plowman* itself.

² See p.22.

Brunne in his prologue to *Handlyng Synne*, dated “a þousynd and þre hundryd & þre:”³

For lewed men y undyr toke
On englyssh tonge to make þys boke,
For many beyn of swyche manere
Þat talys & rymys wyle bleþly here
Yn gamys, yn festys, & at þe ale,
Loue men to lestene trotouale,
Þat may falle ofte to velanye
To dedly synne or outhur folye.
For swyche men haue y made þys ryme
Þat þey may weyl dyspende here tyme
And þer yn sumwhat for to here
To leue al swyche foul manere
And for to kun knowe þer ynne
Þat þey wene no synne be ynne.⁴

The work is an elaborated translation of the Anglo-French *Manuel des Pechiez*,⁵ specifically aimed at “lewed men,” in order to satisfy their thirst for “talys & rymys” with a work of spiritual edification, in direct opposition to more frivolous popular works which tend towards “velanye” or worse. As has been noted, in the early decades of the fourteenth century the English vernacular was widely considered to have a low social status, which may account for the apparently limited popularity of the work, as book ownership is, of course, dependent upon sufficient wealth.⁶ However, it is important to note that, even at such an early date, a writer in the English vernacular was making a self-conscious attempt to manipulate lay tastes in literature towards a work of devotional didacticism.

Writing rather later in the fourteenth century, Langland makes no such explicit statement of intent: indeed, there is no expository prologue at all and, as Middleton has noted,

Not only do *Piers* manuscripts lack signs of authorial supervision...but the poem

³ Robert Mannyng of Brunne, *Handlyng Synne*, ed. Idelle Sullens (Binghamton N.Y., 1983), l.76.

⁴ *Ibid.*, ll.43-56.

⁵ Sections of *Manuel des Pechiez* are reproduced as a parallel text in *Robert of Brunne's "Handlyng Synne,"* ed. Frederick J. Furnivall (London, 1901, 1903).

⁶ Sullens points to the greater popularity of the French *Manuel* in her introduction to *Handlyng Synne*, p.XVII. See also *ibid.*, pp.XXIII-XXXIII for manuscript survival of *Handlyng Synne*.

itself seems pointedly to avoid issuing formal instructions for use.⁷

It is tempting, therefore, to interpret Langland's opening evocation of the conventional dream-vision form as a deliberate strategy for engaging the interest of the "lewed" reader before moving into more complex territory.

Hussey has concisely summed up the nature setting which opens the poem; "it is summer and there is a stream whose bubbling sends the Dreamer to sleep on its bank."⁸ That the conventional evocation of summer familiar from such works as the earlier *Wynnere and Wastoure* and the approximately contemporary *Parlement of the Thre Ages* has been pared down in *Piers Plowman* is undeniable,⁹ yet the mere fact of the employment of this poetic trope is indicative of Langland's intention to relate his work to its alliterative predecessors. In so doing, Langland arouses expectations in his readers based on a familiarity with other works utilising similar forms of opening. Spearing has written that

It is generally true of the tradition to which *Piers Plowman* belongs that dreams offer an insight into life in this world rather than information about the other world, and that the paradisaical landscape is one in which the dreamer falls asleep rather than one in which he finds himself in his dream.¹⁰

As *Piers Plowman* progresses towards its apocalyptic conclusion, the concern with "life in this world," although remaining, recedes in prominence beneath layers of allegory. I would suggest, therefore, that Langland makes use of the seasonal convention, albeit in a perfunctory fashion, in order both to attract the attention of the reader who, like Will,

⁷ Anne Middleton, "The Audience and Public of *Piers Plowman*," in *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and its Literary Background*, ed. David A. Lawton (Cambridge, 1982), p.111.

⁸ S.S. Hussey, "Langland's Reading of Alliterative Poetry," *MLR* 60 (1965): 167.

⁹ On the dating of *Wynnere and Wastoure* and *Parlement of the Thre Ages*, see Thorlac Turville-Petre (ed.), *Alliterative Poetry of the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1989), pp.38-39 & 67. For the suggestion that *Piers Plowman* in fact pre-dates *Wynnere and Wastoure*, see David A. Lawton, "The Unity of Middle English Alliterative Poetry," *Spec* 58 (1983): 80-81.

¹⁰ A.C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge, 1976), p.131.

wishes to hear “wondres,”¹¹ and also to provide an “anchor” for the poem, explicitly holding the complex discussions which develop to the firm ground of worldly concerns. Once this has been established in the first instance, there is no need to employ such formulaic preludes to subsequent dreams within the poem. Indeed, by the time of the C-text revision, even the stream has been abandoned from the opening description in Langland's haste to enter into the subject of Will's visions, and one may speculate that the growing reputation of earlier versions had removed the necessity for all but the briefest statement of intention.¹²

The question which immediately arises, however, is: who comprised this readership which Langland hoped to attract? Mannyng specifically associated unedifying tales with “lewed men,” but if, in the opening years of the fourteenth century, the distinction between “lewed” and “lered” had (at least in theory) corresponded with the distinction between layman and cleric,¹³ by the close of the century this was certainly not the case.¹⁴ Burrow has pointed out that by the early years of the fifteenth century, *Piers Plowman* was being read by two kinds of audience - “the old audience of clerks, and the new one of prosperous, literate laymen.”¹⁵ Indeed, bequests of books by “prosperous, literate laymen” in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries suggest that, amongst this group, didactic and devotional

¹¹ *PPL.*, B Prologue l.4. All references to the B-Text are taken from *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. A.V.C. Schmidt (London, 1978). I shall initially base my discussion on the B-text, as this represents the earliest “long” version of the poem. I shall consider the revisions made in the C-text, in the context of the work's influence upon the *Piers Plowman* tradition,” in chapter Six. Although, as I shall go on to argue, I do not believe that Chaucer was a member of Langland's intended audience, Bennett has suggested that the opening of *Piers Plowman* might have had precisely this effect of enticement upon Chaucer: J.A.W. Bennett, “Chaucer's Contemporary,” in *Piers Plowman: Critical Approaches*, ed. S.S. Hussey (London, 1969), p.322.

¹² Kerby-Fulton has suggested that the complete abandonment of idyllic natural settings for the poem's later visions is intended to align the work with “the recording of real religious vision.” Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism and Piers Plowman* (Cambridge, 1990), p.119. Whilst this argument is convincing, I feel that throughout the poem's revisions, the opening allusion to dream-vision convention remains a fixed point of reference.

¹³ This “fundamental axiom,” of course, did not necessarily reflect daily experience. On lay literacy and clerical illiteracy in the eleventh to fourteenth centuries, see Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, pp.224-240.

¹⁴ On criticisms of unlearned clergics, see pp.54-56 below.

¹⁵ J.A. Burrow, “The Audience of *Piers Plowman*,” *Anglia* 75 (1957):378.

works were much more widely read than those on secular subjects.¹⁶ However, this evidence of mixed readership perhaps obscures the important distinction drawn by Middleton between “audience” and “public” - the former being the readership which was actually achieved by the work, whilst the latter may be defined as the readership envisaged by the writer.¹⁷ I shall, in the present chapter, suggest that the public to which Langland addressed his work was essentially clerical: more particularly, the work is aimed at imperfect (possibly “lewed”) clerics who, once captured by the poem’s conventional opening, would be turned towards the “sentence” therein.

That *Piers Plowman* reached a varied audience in the fifteenth century is undeniable: we know, for example, that William Palmere, rector of St. Alphage, Cripplegate, London, bequeathed “librum meum vocatum peres plowman” to one Agnes Eggesfeld in 1400;¹⁸ a unique (as far as we are aware) instance of early female ownership. It is to be regretted that we cannot know which version of the poem Palmere considered suitable for such a recipient. At an even earlier date, it has been suggested that Thomas Usk (d. 1388), secretary to John of Northampton, Mayor of London 1381-1383, may have been influenced by the C-text of *Piers Plowman* in composing his *Testament of Love*,¹⁹ although the case is far from conclusive,²⁰ whilst rather more persuasive is the evidence for Chaucer’s knowledge of the

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.378. See also Scattergood, “Literary Culture at the Court of Richard II,” pp.42-43.

¹⁷ Middleton, “Audience and Public,” pp.101-102.

¹⁸ The will is reproduced and discussed in Robert A. Wood, “A Fourteenth-Century London Owner of *Piers Plowman*,” *MAE* 53 (1984): 83-90.

¹⁹ This suggestion was first put forward in the introduction to W.W. Skeat (ed.), *Chaucerian and Other Pieces* (Oxford, 1897), pp.xxvii-xxviii and notes.

²⁰ More recently, Hudson has found some of Skeat’s parallels “unconvincing,” although “the echoes of the Tree of Charity are more persuasive” (*Testament of Love*, III 7 ll.9-85, *PPL.*, C XVIII ll.1-52): Anne Hudson, “Epilogue: The Legacy of *Piers Plowman*,” in *A Companion to Piers Plowman*, ed. John A. Alford (London, 1988), p.252. Godden has gone further and claimed that the comparison with the Tree of Charity only appear significant because of Skeat’s editorial intervention: Malcolm Godden, *The Making of Piers Plowman* (London, 1990), pp.171-172.

work.²¹ The evidence provided by extant wills, however, identifies only clerical ownership in the fourteenth century.²² To be sure, the reference by John Ball in his letter to the Essex commons during the 1381 uprising would suggest that he anticipated a certain amount of recognition amongst his audience,²³ and the degree to which this may be expected will be considered later in the present chapter, but there is no evidence to suggest that the public for which *Piers Plowman* was intended was anything other than clerical. Indeed, what appears to be a sincere exhortation to “freres and fele othere maistres” to do no more than

tellen men of the ten comaundements, and touchen the sevene synnes,
And of the braunches that burjoneth of hem and bryngen men to helle,
And how that folk in folies mysspenden hir fyve wittes,²⁴

suggests that Langland considered complex doctrinal discussion, as found in his work, to be decidedly unsuitable for a lay audience.

Bearing in mind these considerations regarding Langland’s audience and public, let us return to the kind of book which he appears to be writing. A hierarchy of literary genres is stressed in the words of the figure of Sloth:

“If I sholde deye bi this day,” quod he, “me list nought to loke.
I kan noght parfitly my Paternoster as the preest it syngeth,
But I kan rymes of Robyn Hood and Randolf Erl of Chestre,
Ac neither of Oure Lord ne of Oure Lady the leeste that evere was maked.”²⁵

The rivalry between the literature of “lust” and that of “lore,” to use Gower’s convenient

²¹ The influence of *Piers Plowman* upon Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* will be discussed in chapter Five below.

²² Burrow, “Audience,” pp.374-375. For an overview of surviving manuscripts, see the introductions to: William Langland, *Piers Plowman: The A Version*, ed. George Kane (London, 1960), pp.1-18; William Langland, *Piers Plowman: The B Version*, ed. George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson (London, 1975), pp.1-15. As has been noted above in the case of William Palmere, however, although surviving wills indicate that the earlier fourteenth-century owners of *Piers Plowman* were clerics, these owners did not necessarily bequeath their copies to other members of the clergy.

²³ For the text of the letter, see R.B. Dobson, *The Peasants’ Revolt of 1381* (London, 1938), p.381. For Ball’s apparent borrowings from Langland see also Helen Cooper, “Langland’s and Chaucer’s Prologues,” *YLS* 1 (1987): 73-74.

²⁴ *PPL*, B XV ll.70,74-76.

²⁵ *PPL*, B V ll.395-398.

distinction, is thus given prominence at the opening of Sloth's confession, suggesting, in accord with Mannyng, that a penchant for such worthless tales lays the foundation for sin; particularly, in this case, the sin of sloth. Sloth displays a neglect of those words which inspire the active life of Christian virtue, specifically the most important of prayers which came from the lips of Christ himself,²⁶ in favour of words which require mere passive enjoyment of a frivolous nature. To Langland, for whom "words and works" provide an ever-present moral yardstick, no other sin is as serious as sloth, which is always placed last when the sins are listed,²⁷ thus attaining greatest prominence. Although *Piers Plowman* may initially seduce the slothful reader with promises of "wondres," it soon becomes apparent that one of Langland's most prominent themes is the necessity of hard work in the scheme of salvation: amongst its many facets, *Piers Plowman* is very much an "anti-sloth" exhortation.

Stokes has argued for the centrality of Matthew 18:28, "*redde quod debes*," to Langland's work,²⁸ but whilst the threat offered to such a concept of justice by an avaricious society's "exchanging justice for meed" is undeniably a concern which permeates the poem,²⁹ it should be noted that the overthrow of avarice is inextricably bound up with the abandonment of spiritual sloth. Indeed, the penance which Coveitise proposes for himself involves the active course of pilgrimage to Walsingham.³⁰ It is made clear, however, that this purely physical act is inadequate, and may even be wholly inappropriate, as is emphasised

²⁶ See Matthew 6.9-13.

²⁷ See *PPL*, B II 1.99, V 1.386, XIII 1.407 & XIV 1.253. This emphasis may also be found in *Fasciculus morum*, p.512, where the seven deadly sins are listed in opposition to clauses in the paternoster, culminating in the equivalence of evil with sloth: "'Set libera nos a malo,' scilicet per opera misericordie et alia opera penitencie, contra accidiam."

²⁸ Myra Stokes, *Justice and Mercy in Piers Plowman. A Reading of the B-Text* (London, 1984), p.6.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.278.

³⁰ *PPL*, B V 11.226-227.

by the subsequent criticism of pilgrims in the poem.³¹ What Coveitise fails to grasp is that work of a much higher order is required: it is spiritual activity alone which may make amends.

The close relationship between Coveitise and Sloth is emphasised in two striking parallels: as Coveitise has “two blered eyghen,”³² so Sloth has “two slymy eighen;”³³ and realisation of the gravity of his sins causes Coveitise to fall into despair,³⁴ a condition generally associated with sloth.³⁵ However, the sins are not equal, for it should be remembered that once temporal debts are paid, the spiritual work of penance remains to be done.³⁶ A similar association of the two may be found in *Fasciculus morum*, which refers to the “terra avaricie et cupiditatis” and, later, the “vomere confessionis” which facilitates the planting of the seed of charity:³⁷ the same imagery is used, but ultimately it is spiritual, rather than merely physical, work which must break up avarice.

As Will initially surveys the field of folk, it is those who shun labour who are first depicted as being prone to sin:

Bidderes and beggeres faste aboute yede
Til hire bely and hir bagge were bredful ycrammed,
Faiteden for hire foode, foughten at the ale.
In glotonye, God woot, go thei to bedde,
And risen with ribaudie, tho Roberdes knaves;

³¹ *Ibid.*, B V ll.515-536. This criticism of pilgrimage is, like so many aspects of *Piers Plowman*, prefigured in the Prologue, in which the experience of pilgrimage is said to give the pilgrims “leve to lyen al hire lif after:” *ibid.*, B Prologue l.49. I shall return to a consideration of pilgrimage in chapter Five.

³² *Ibid.*, B V l.188.

³³ *Ibid.*, B V l.386.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, B V l.279.

³⁵ Blindness and despair will be discussed more fully below.

³⁶ See PPl. B XIX ll.394-395; “Thow counseillest us to yelde / Al that we owen any wight er we go to housel?” This may, however, be considered as a “debt” to God, which is paid by “doing one’s best.” Janet Coleman, *Piers Plowman and the Moderni* (Rome, 1981), pp.39-41 & 122. This interpretation emphasises the opposition of “redde quod debes” to sloth, rather than avarice.

³⁷ *Fasciculus morum*, pp.392, 548 & 534.

Sleep and sory sleuthe seweth hem evere.³⁸

They are subject to all of the sins of the flesh, but whereas “glotonye” and “ribaudie” come and go, “sory sleuthe seweth hem evere.”³⁹

It has been convincingly argued that the apparent alternation of the speaker's identity between layman and cleric throughout Sloth's confession is evidence of the direct influence of manuals of pastoral instruction, in which questions appropriate to all classes of men were listed.⁴⁰ What is perhaps worthy of further emphasis is the particular appropriateness of the adoption of this influence. Episcopal legislation in thirteenth-century England had stimulated the development of a manual literature for the clergy,⁴¹ the purpose of which, as concisely defined in the personalised prologue to *Fasciculus morum*, was “ad vestrum solacium et utilitatem simplicium.”⁴² The clergy effectively acted as oral mediators between the authoritative text and the laity.⁴³ Langland, following the same pattern as the manuals, poses questions pertinent to both estates within the single, multi-faceted personification of Sloth. Consequently, this final, and perhaps most serious, sin not only fails to live up to the layman's Christian responsibilities, but has at the same time been “preest and person passynge thritty wynter,”⁴⁴ displaying an equal lack of diligence in this more responsible

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Prologue ll.40-45.

³⁹ I am here taking “ribaudie” to be a facet of the sin of lechery. The practice of “using a branch for the main sin” was not uncommon. See Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Michigan, 1952), p.147.

⁴⁰ Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill, 1967), pp.139-144. Burrow, working on manuscript evidence, reaches the same conclusion: Burrow, “Audience,” p.375.

⁴¹ Vincent Gillespie, “*Doctrina and Predicacio*: The Design and Function of Some Pastoral Manuals,” *LSE* n.s.11 (1980): 36-37.

⁴² *Fasciculus morum*, p.30. Although originally written by a Franciscan for use by other friars, textual variation throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries suggest that the work became widely known and used by secular clergy as well. See Frances A. Foster, “A Note on the *Fasciculus morum*,” *Franciscan Studies* 8 (1948): 202.

⁴³ Throughout the text of *Fasciculus morum*, points are consistently reinforced with allusions to scriptural, patristic and classical authorities.

⁴⁴ *PPL.*, B V 1.416.

role:

...kan I neyther solve ne synge ne seintes lyves rede,
But I kan fynden in a feld or in a furlang an hare
Bettre than in *Beatus vir* or in *Beati omnes*
Construe clausemele and kenne it to my parishens.⁴⁵

Once more, Sloth's failings are exemplified in the division between "lust" and "lore," with clerical illiteracy defining the extent of slothfulness. Whereas in the persona of a layman, Sloth confessed to an inability to recite his Paternoster "as the preest it syngeth," the fault is now elevated into the greater vice of those who dissipate the authority which has been bestowed upon them by virtue of their position. The sin is compounded by Sloth's failure to mediate effectively the scriptural authority pertaining to the blessed life, as propounded in Psalms 1 and 128, the texts to which he makes specific reference.⁴⁶

In spite of his professed illiteracy, Sloth is able to conclude his confession with a Latin proverb, "*Heu michi quia sterilem vitam duxi iuvenilem!*"⁴⁷ In contrast to his lack of understanding of the psalms, which utilise metaphors of fruitfulness to describe the necessary conduct of the true Christian, this final utterance of despair over a fruitless (*sterilem*) life is pointedly completed in Latin, adding weight to his self-accusation of barrenness.⁴⁸ Sloth becomes, as it were, an anti-authority, making use of allusion to literary practices and linguistic hierarchies in order to enact a progression of self-condemnation of ascending gravity.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, B V ll.417-420.

⁴⁶ Psalm 1 commences "Beatus vir," Psalm 128 "Beati omnes." Both psalms, furthermore, describe the blessed life in terms of fruitfulness which are appropriate in the context of agricultural metaphor used throughout *Piers Plowman*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, B V l.441a. That this saying is proverbial, rather than scriptural, should also be noted. For its occurrence in a collection of "popular proverbs," see John A. Alford, "Some Unidentified Quotations in *Piers Plowman*," *Modern Philology* 72 (1974-5): 390-399 and W.A. Pantin, "A Medieval Collection of Latin and English Proverbs and Riddles, from the Rylands Latin MS. 394," *BJRL* 14 (1930): 81-114.

⁴⁸ The writer of *Fasciculus morum* also echoes this analogy, with customary scriptural and patristic support, stating that sloth is odious and detestable, "quia nullum fructum bone conversacionis profert:" *Fasciculus morum*, p.420.

Although Passus V is explicit in its focus upon sin and confession, the discussion of sin, particularly sloth, and of penance, continues throughout the poem as a whole. Perhaps the most significant reason for Langland's concentration upon the sin of sloth is its close relationship with despair, an issue which has already been touched upon briefly,⁴⁹ but which justifies further comment.

"Ware thee - for Wanhope wolde thee bitraye,"⁵⁰ warns *Vigilate*, alluding to this commonplace of medieval thought.⁵¹ This may be observed in the case of Haukyn, the embodiment of *Activa Vita*, the self-proclaimed hater of idleness.⁵² In spite of his enthusiasm for temporal activity, he nevertheless remains prey to sloth, for when the excesses of his lifestyle take their inevitable toll, he fears to die "in dedlich synne:"

That into wanhope he worth and wende nought to be saved,
The whiche is sleuthe, so slow that may no sleighes helpe it,
Ne no mercy amenden the man that so deieth.⁵³

As his "cote of Cristendom" proves to be more stained the closer it is inspected,⁵⁴ so his increased self-awareness shows the effects of his spiritual sloth all the more clearly; a growing realisation which leads to despair. The reader is reminded of Sloth's statement that he "list not to loke" if he should die,⁵⁵ he would rather keep his "slymy eighen" closed,⁵⁶

⁴⁹ See p.36 above.

⁵⁰ *PPL.*, B V l.445.

⁵¹ For example, "Sloghenes, hyt wyl þe grope / To brynge þe yn-to whanhope:" Robert of Brunne, *Handlyng Synne*, ll.5171-5172. Also, "Efter alle þise zor uolle poyns of sleuthe / him yefþ þe dyeuel / þane strok dyadlych / and dep him into wanhope:" *Ayenbite of Inwyte*, ed. Pamela Gradon (repr. London, 1965), p.34.

⁵² *PPL.*, B XIII ll.225 & 238.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, B XIII ll.406-408.

⁵⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, B XIII ll.273-276, 315-319, 342-343, etc.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, B V l.394.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, B V l.386.

although, as in the case of Haukyn, *Vigilate* ultimately prevents this.⁵⁷

The close relationship between sloth and despair is emphasised in the closing passus of the poem, as the barn of Unity is assailed:

Sleuthe wax wonder yerne and soone was of age,
And wedded oon Wanhope, a wenche of the stuwes.
Hir sire was a sysour that nevere swoor truthe-
Oon Tomme Two-tonge, atteynt at ech a queste.⁵⁸

Sloth is wedded to despair. Furthermore, Despair is represented as the offspring of a false witness, a patrimony which appears to be a further reference to dishonest penitential self-examination. Once more, a blind eye is being turned to revealed failings, bearing out the earlier words of the Samaritan, here used as an exemplar of the unity of charitable words and works:

Numquam dimittitur peccatum &c.
Thus it fareth by swich folk that falsly al hire lyves
Yvele lyven and leten noght til lif hem forsake.
Drede of desperacion thanne dryveth away grace,
That mercy in hir mynde may noght thanne falle;
Good hope, that helpe sholde, to wanhope torneth.⁵⁹

The outcome of sloth is despair, which “dryveth away grace,” precluding the salvation which should be the goal of the Christian. Penance is prescribed as the remedy,⁶⁰ but a true knowledge of one’s sins is first required, for it is not sufficient merely to labour towards purely temporal ends.⁶¹

⁵⁷ A later example of the wrong sort of work leading to blindness, described in very physical terms, is that of Chaucer’s Canon’s Yeoman, who states of his corrupt labour that “of my swynk yet blered is myn ye:” *CT.*, VIII, (G), l.730. In contrast, Piers’ diligent labour - the devotional connotations of which are made explicit in the statement, “I wol worshipe therwith Truthe by my leve / And ben His pilgrym atte plow for povere mennes sake” (*PPL.*, B VI ll.101-102) - leads to his becoming an overseer, observing and assessing the merit of all (*ibid.*, B VI ll.112-114).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, B XX ll.159-162.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, B XVII l.307a-312.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, B XVII ll.316ff.

⁶¹ On the notion of Haukyn as embodiment of “Practical Life,” see Stella Maguire, “The Significance of Haukyn, *Activa Vita*, in *Piers Plowman*,” in *Style and Symbolism in Piers Plowman*, ed. Robert J. Blanch (Knoxville, 1969), pp.194-208.

The scripturally grounded notion of spiritual blindness to which Langland alludes is common currency in discussions of Christian duty. John Mirk, writing in the early years of the fifteenth century, opened his *Instructions for Parish Priests* with the following introduction:

God seyth hym-self, as wryten we fynde,
That whenne þe blynde ledeth þe blynde,
In-to þe dyche þey fallen boo,
For þey ne sen where-by to go.
So faren prestes now by dawes;
They beth so blynde in goddes lawe,
That whenne þey scholde þe pepul rede
In-to synne þey do hem lede.⁶²

As Mirk here stresses the responsibility of the priest to open his own eyes before attempting to open those of his parishioners,⁶³ so Langland uses the same metaphor in an all-encompassing call for self-knowledge, which is the necessary first step to the attainment of grace. It is worthy of note that in the closing lines of *Piers Plowman*, Sloth and Pride make their final assault upon Conscience only after the friar's easy confession;⁶⁴ the sins of mankind are abetted by the attitudes of a self-interested clergy, and that which is wilfully ignored as a consequence is "seen," and taken advantage of, by Sloth.⁶⁵

Discussing the presentation of the sin of sloth in Langland's work, Wenzel has suggested that

In Langland's vision, therefore, sloth means negligence both in man's relations with God and in his dealings with his fellow man and society, particularly in the common laborer's attitude toward his work and his duty of providing the necessities of life. The latter aspect is peculiar to Langland's thought, at least in the comparison with the treatment of acedia in theological literature, and in this sense one might well say that in Langland's vision the concept bears a strong secular or social emphasis. But one must at once add that Langland simultaneously stresses

⁶² John Mirk, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, ed. Gillis Kristensson (Lund, 1974), III.1-8.

⁶³ See also *Fasciculus morum* 5.3 for further discussion of this issue, in which several scriptural texts are cited. *Fasciculus morum*, p.416.

⁶⁴ *PPL.*, B XX II.363-375.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, B XX I.374.

the spiritual aspect of sloth by a singular emphasis on wanhope or despair.⁶⁶

However, although Langland makes use of established literary conventions in order to ground his discussions in the temporal world, his work is far from secular in nature, and I would argue against perceiving in *Piers Plowman* a particular emphasis upon sloth as “neglect of social duties.”⁶⁷ It is true that some audiences since the poem’s composition have seen in the figure of Piers a personified type of the “common labourer,” to be either idealised or discredited, according to the individual’s political viewpoint.⁶⁸

In order to find a model for Piers, however, one should perhaps look less to contemporary labourers and more to the contemporary pastoral literature with which a minor cleric such as Langland, and possibly his intended public, would have been familiar.⁶⁹ As Barney has demonstrated, by the fourteenth century there was an established tradition, based on scriptural exegesis, in which the office of priesthood was described in agricultural metaphors.⁷⁰ Kirk, in seeking to qualify Barney’s account of Piers’ purely allegorical lineage, has declared that there is no evidence of a positive ploughman tradition: whilst Christ offers a stern rebuke to anyone “putting his hand to the plough, and looking back,”⁷¹ when one turns to specific biblical characters,

Plowmen are almost invariably villains, from plowman Cain who killed shepherd

Abel to the New Testament guest who refuses to attend the wedding feast because

⁶⁶ Wenzel, *Sin of Sloth*, p.142.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.142.

⁶⁸ The interpretative responses of different audiences to the figure of Piers in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries will be discussed below in chapters Four to Six.

⁶⁹ I am accepting the commonly held view of Langland as “a married clerk, of an order certainly no higher than acolyte, who made his living in an irregular fashion by saying prayers for the dead or for the living who supported him.” E. Talbot Donaldson, *Piers Plowman. The C-Text and Its Poet* (Oxford, 1949), p.220.

⁷⁰ Stephen A. Barney, “The Plowshare of the Tongue: The Progress of a Symbol from the Bible to *Piers Plowman*,” *MS 35* (1973): 261-293.

⁷¹ Luke 9.62.

he has a team of oxen to try.⁷²

In illustrating this tradition of negative representation, Kirk cites the example of late thirteenth-century manuscripts of the *Somme le Roi*, in which “idleness” is invariably pictured as “a plowman asleep under a tree, his plow abandoned.”⁷³ Whilst I would not disagree with the suggestion that Langland’s physical conception of Piers is influenced by contemporary ploughmen,⁷⁴ I would suggest that the common image of the idle ploughman, in concert with the allegorical tradition outlined by Barney, would provide a more likely figure for Langland to adapt for his “anti-sloth” work: the diligent Christian labourer who, rather than succumbing to the idleness so abhorrent to Langland, “puts his hand to the plough.”⁷⁵ Metaphors of husbandry were widely applicable in religious discourse, and with this in mind it is fruitful to turn once more to *Fasciculus morum*,⁷⁶ with especial consideration given to part 5, which addresses the sin of sloth.

The broad circulation of *Fasciculus morum* has already been noted.⁷⁷ Furthermore, in addition to this, evidence of extensive borrowing from *Fasciculus morum* may be found in sermon collections from the fifteenth century.⁷⁸ This widespread usage and influence

⁷² Elizabeth D. Kirk, “Langland’s Plowman and the Recreation of Fourteenth-Century Religious Metaphor,” *YLS* 2 (1988): 3.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.9. See also Eric George Millar, introduction to *An Illuminated Manuscript of La Somme le Roy Attributed to the Parisian Miniaturist Honore* (Oxford, 1953), p.13.

⁷⁴ Kirk notes the contractual nature of the contemporary ploughman’s labour: a point which Piers turns to allegorical use in describing his contract with his master, Truthe: Kirk, “Langland’s Plowman,” p.6; *PPL.*, B V ll.542-552.

⁷⁵ In discussing a rare extensive comparison of the religious life to that of a plowman - that of Cassian’s *Collations of the Fathers* - Kirk concludes that “the specialized monastic audience... puts Cassian’s impact far from Langland’s more general audience:” Kirk, “Langland’s Plowman,” p.11. This distinction, however, is less marked if we accept that Langland, too, had a “specialized audience” in mind when writing *Piers Plowman*.

⁷⁶ The possible relationship between *Piers Plowman* and *Fasciculus morum* is touched upon, although not elaborated, by Alan J. Fletcher in his review of Wenzel’s edition of *Fasciculus morum*, *YLS* 4 (1990): 184-187.

⁷⁷ See above, p.37, n.42.

⁷⁸ Alan J. Fletcher and Susan Powell, “The Origins of a Fifteenth-Century Sermon Collection: MSS Harley 2247 and Royal 18 B XXV,” *LSE* n.s. 10 (1978): 88-90.

throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries provides a firm foundation for suspecting a direct influence upon Langland's work, and *Fasciculus morum* 5.25 may well have provided a metaphorical framework central to *Piers Plowman*.⁷⁹

The chapter takes as its theme “those things which hinder almsgiving” (*que elemosinam impediunt*),⁸⁰ and elaborates this by employing the analogy of a seed which is prevented from bearing fruit.⁸¹ The obstacles which hinder almsgiving are the seven deadly sins, the effects of which are described in terms relating to the original agricultural metaphor; pride is that which exposes the seed to “the wind of human praise” (*vento humane laudis*) when it should rather be covered by “the earth of humility” (*terra humilitatis*); avarice is the planting of the seed too deeply; and so on. Whilst the notion of almsgiving bearing fruit may relate to the rich history of tree imagery in Christian allegorical tradition,⁸² what is particularly relevant in this instance is the manner in which the Christian is exhorted to tend the crop. Each of the sins is an aspect of spiritual sloth, the remedy for which is appropriately described in terms of good husbandry:

Prima est quod antequam iaciatur in terram, necessaria est diligens preparacio terre, quia si sit infructuosa, debet primo comburi igne contricionis et postea arari vomere confessionis.⁸³

[First, before the seed is cast upon the soil, the latter must be carefully prepared; if it is sterile, it must first be burned with the fire of contrition and then be ploughed with the ploughshare of confession.]

⁷⁹ *Fasciculus morum* is, of course, only one of many works of its kind which could have been known by Langland. For a broad view of Langland's possible debt to penitential literature, see Nicholas John Gray, “A Study of *Piers Plowman* in Relation to the Medieval Penitential Tradition,” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Jesus College, Cambridge, 1984).

⁸⁰ *Fasciculus morum*, pp.544-555.

⁸¹ This elaborates the comparison between alms and seed which provides the subject matter for chapters 5.23 and 5.24, and broadens the application into “semen bonorum operum” in general. *Fasciculus morum*, p.548.

⁸² This tradition is discussed in relation to *Piers Plowman* in A. Joan Bowers, “The Tree of Charity in *Piers Plowman*,” in *Literary Monographs* 6, ed. Eric Rothstein and Joseph Anthony Wittreich Jr. (Wisconsin, 1975), pp.17-32.

⁸³ My italics.

The team of oxen is composed of the five senses along with the faculty of memory, the servant who leads the plough is “hope of future glory” (*spes future glorie*), and the oxen are goaded by “fear of punishment” (*timor pene*).

As has been noted, Piers’ status as a labourer attracted immediate attention, as is evinced by the invocation of “Peres Ploughman” in the “peasant letters” of 1381,⁸⁴ an interpretation which has led Barron to conclude that

The perception of Piers is...certainly the same in both the letters and in the poem: Piers is a good man who faithfully carries out the work to which he was called, which is to till the land so that it may produce the food whereby others may live. In the faithfulness of Piers lies both the hope and the means of salvation (although whether this salvation is to be political or spiritual remains ambiguous).⁸⁵

However, when read in relation to the above passage from *Fasciculus morum*, there is surely no ambiguity, for Langland’s diligent labourer appears as wholly figurative of the ideal Christian life,⁸⁶ providing an exemplary guide to others, and coming to be understood “in terms of the highest spiritual authority - in those of love and truth.”⁸⁷ Indeed, the relative lack of significance placed by Langland upon “the common laborer’s attitude toward his

⁸⁴ The letters are reproduced in Dobson, *Peasants’ Revolt*, pp.380-383. We must, of course, bear in mind that “in no part of England for which documentary evidence survives in quantity do peasants appear to have risen in complete isolation from members of other social classes”(*ibid.*, p.13), which allows for the possibility of a politically-charged reading being passed from those (such as the minor cleric Ball) who were familiar with *Piers Plowman* to those unfamiliar with the text itself. Justice has characterised the rebels’ appropriation of *Piers Plowman* thus: “*Piers Plowman* gave the rising a language and a style, an imaginative model of rural articulacy that conferred on empirical language a conceptual utility and a public force. The poem’s doctrines were less important.” Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (London, 1994), pp.102-139. It is interesting to note that a bilingual English/Latin poem written shortly after the rising specifically defines Jack Straw’s followers as ploughmen (“the wycche were wont to lowte / *aratrum traducere stiva*,” printed in Dobson *Peasants’ Revolt.*, pp.358-361), perhaps acknowledging the centrality of *Piers Plowman* to the rhetoric of the rising.

⁸⁵ Caroline M. Barron, “William Langland: A London Poet,” in *Chaucer’s England*, ed. Barbara Hanawalt (Minneapolis, 1992), p.100.

⁸⁶ Whilst acknowledging Langland’s debt to Christian allegorical traditions, Dyer has nonetheless suggested that Langland also intended the ploughman to represent an exemplary “figure of modest substance and some little authority.” Christopher Dyer, “Piers Plowman and Plowmen: A Historical Perspective,” *YLS* 8 (1994): 163. This, however, seems rather unlikely - or, at very least, a gross mis-calculation on Langland’s part - since subsequent appropriations of this “hardy, self-reliant backbone of society” (*ibid.*, p.163) most frequently employ him as a fermenter of religious or social dissent, as we shall see in coming chapters.

⁸⁷ Elizabeth Salter, *Piers Plowman: An Introduction* (Oxford, 1962), p.84.

work and his duty” may be seen by briefly referring once more to his personification of *Activa Vita*:

If I yede to the plowgh, I pynched so narwe
That a foot lond or a forow fecchen I wolde
Of my nexte neghebore, nymen of his erthe.⁸⁸

Maguire has pointed out that Haukyn is not an individual, but “the personification of a whole manner of life,”⁸⁹ and this passing allusion to his status as a corrupt ploughman is surely intended to highlight the contrast between this manner of life and that personified by Piers in passus V and VI,⁹⁰ whose own ploughing is, as has been noted above,⁹¹ imbued with devotional connotations. Within the space of a few lines, Haukyn refers directly to his lack of compunction “witterly to biseche / Mercy for my mysdedes,”⁹² revealing the true significance of his failings; once more, he is failing in his Christian duty diligently to employ the “ploughshare of confession.” The worldly reader, pursuing the manner of life embodied in Haukyn, should recognise this and turn his conscience to “seken Piers the Plowman.”⁹³

Kynde Wit wolde that ech a wight wroghte,
Or in techynge or in tellynge or travaillynge in preieres -
Contemplatif lif or Actif lif, Crist wolde men wroghte.⁹⁴

This earlier statement would, on the surface, suggest that “kynde wit,” which may be

⁸⁸ *PPL.*, B XIII ll.370-372.

⁸⁹ Maguire, “Significance of Haukyn,” p.202.

⁹⁰ Although a far less common image, it is not unknown for the devil to use the plough. Taking an exemplar from Bede 5.13 [*Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), pp.498-502], *Fasciculus morum* tells of a knight who, upon refusing the opportunity to make a death-bed confession, is tormented by demons with “duobus vomeribus ignitis.” *Fasciculus morum*, p.488. Whilst it is possible that Bede’s “uomeres” may be translated as “daggers” (see *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, pp.501-502, n.2), a translation supported by Mannyng’s use of the tale (*Handlyng Synne*, l.4489), the writer of *Fasciculus morum* appends the English word “cultris.” It may reasonably be assumed, therefore, that this relates directly to the *Fasciculus morum* notion of the “ploughshare of confession:” that which the sinner does not plough up during his own lifetime will afterwards be ploughed up by the devil.

⁹¹ See p.40, n.57.

⁹² *PPL.*, B XIII ll.384-385.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, B XX l.383.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, B VI ll.247-249.

translated as something approximating “natural understanding,” dictates a higher importance to physical labour. The two-fold nature of legitimate labour, active and contemplative, is framed by the repeated verb “wroghte,” which apparently emphasises the connotations of activity inherent even in purely contemplative pursuits. However, as White has noted,

it is... highly unlikely that Langland would associate *kynde wit* as insistently as he does with Conscience, were *kynde wit*’s essential concern with *temporalia* or the physical *bonum*.⁹⁵

The statement is thereby situated within the broader context of mankind’s duty to work towards salvation.⁹⁶ Once more, Langland’s text may be illuminated by reference to *Fasciculus morum*, in this case to 5.5.⁹⁷ Expounding upon the issue of “holy activity” (*De occupacione sancta*), the writer puts forward the initial premise that

occupacio bona et honesta duplex est, scilicet activa et contemplativa, hoc est, temporalis et spiritualis.⁹⁸

[good and honest activity is of two kinds, active and contemplative, that is, temporal and spiritual.]

First to be considered is physical work,⁹⁹ but in nominally stressing the need for strenuous physical labour, greater emphasis is in fact placed upon energetic praise and diligence in one's Christian duties:

Quoniam...totum tempus nostrum ordinatum est ad veniam impetrandam, penitenciam agendam, gratiam promerendam, et gloriam ex misericordia Salvatoris consequendam.

[For our whole time is given to us to pray for forgiveness, to do penance, to earn grace, and to obtain glory from the mercy of our Saviour.]

⁹⁵ Hugh White, *Nature and Salvation in Piers Plowman* (Cambridge, 1988), p.9.

⁹⁶ Although it would be stretching the point to claim precise equivalence, there is perhaps a similar idea behind Langland’s insistence upon man’s natural understanding initiating work as there is in the *Fasciculus morum* author’s description, noted above, of man’s natural faculties (five senses and memory) pulling the “ploughshare of confession.”

⁹⁷ *Fasciculus morum*, pp.422-429.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.422.

⁹⁹ It is interesting to note that the first example of necessary labour given in *Fasciculus morum* is ploughing, which is also the first occupation of the “field of folk” specifically mentioned by Langland in *PPL.*, B Prologue l.20.

When the writer turns his attention to contemplative, spiritual work, therefore, its tripartite penitential nature has already been prefigured. In short, although labour is divided into the active and the contemplative, each must be thoroughly permeated by the spiritual in order to be classified as “bona et honesta.”¹⁰⁰ all must be in accordance with “what Truthe hoteth.”¹⁰¹

This basic tenet of Christian life is embedded within Langland's notion of “kynde wit,” and implicitly informs judgement of all notions of work. With this in mind, it is clear that Haukyn's failings are rooted in “unkyndeness.”¹⁰² He is of the type defined by Holi Chirche in her first speech to Will:

The mooste partie of this peple that passeth on this erthe,
Have thei worship in this world, thei wilne no better;
Of oother hevene than here holde thei no tale.¹⁰³

This is precisely the broad public for whom the writer of *Fasciculus morum* composed his collection of “vices and virtues,”¹⁰⁴ in order that they should be drawn into accordance with God's will by the dissemination of his work through sermons. However, the explicit function of *Fasciculus morum* and *Piers Plowman*, as written texts, is subtly, yet decisively, different.

Fasciculus morum commences with a dedicatory statement of purpose, and closes simply with the statement:

¹⁰⁰ This reflects the “works of mercy and other penitential acts” (*opera misericordie et alia opera penitencie*) said to combat sloth in *Fasciculus morum*, p.512. It is also worthy of note that Mirk, in his section “De accidia,” spends the first 34 of his 58 lines discussing failure to perform religious duties. He then returns to this for his last two lines, “Hast þou spared, for hete or colde / To go to Chyrche when þou were holde?” thereby subsuming temporal sloth within the more serious issue of spiritual sloth. Mirk, *Instructions*, pp.128-131.

¹⁰¹ *PPL.*, B V l.548.

¹⁰² He refers to his own dishonest behaviour as “unkynde,” and his corporeal excesses as being “moore...than kynde myghte defie,” (*PPL.*, B XIII ll. 378 & 403). Furthermore, the narrator refers to his religious practices as “an ordre by hymselfe - / Religion saunz rule and resonable obedience,” (*Ibid.*, B XIII ll.284-285). He is without a place within the natural order as defined by God.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, B 1 ll.7-9.

¹⁰⁴ *Fasciculus morum*, p.30.

Et sic terminatur iste libellus.
Finis sermonum fit hec collectio morum.¹⁰⁵

[And thus this book is finished.
This collection of moral matters is for the end of sermons.]

In between are frequent addresses from writer to reader, offering hints on how to make use of the material - for example, “you may tell stories here, as you wish” (*nota narrationes hic ut placet*) or “you may here tell other pious tales and things and amplify them if you wish” (*et ideo hic nota narrationes et alia et dilata ut placet*)¹⁰⁶ - as well as numerous cross-references to enable the reader to locate pertinent subject matter more easily. Its position in the tradition of pastoral manuals is thereby made explicit. However, *Piers Plowman*, although closely related to this tradition, has, as has been noted above, no expository prologue or explicit directions for application.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, Adams has convincingly demonstrated that even the widely-accepted structural divisions which mark stages in the development of the poem’s internal development (*Visio*; *Vita de Dowel, Dobet and Dobest*) are “more likely to derive from the publisher, the patron or the editor than from the author.”¹⁰⁸ These divisions, therefore, along with more extensive annotations on particular manuscripts, may well represent an early desire amongst readers to render the work more “user-friendly.”¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, rather than providing a closed frame, marking off the collection of useful quotations and exempla, Langland effectively leaves his work open, by imbuing the end of his poem with a sense of potential beginnings.¹¹⁰ Following the fall of

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.730.

¹⁰⁶ *Fasciculus morum*, pp.490 & 554.

¹⁰⁷ See p.30-31. Issues relating to Langland’s own use of the poem are considered on pp.90-91 and 98-99 below.

¹⁰⁸ Robert Adams, “The Reliability of the Rubrics in the B-Text of *Piers Plowman*,” *MAE* 54 (1985): 213.

¹⁰⁹ On the addition of annotation in order to provide a guide for the reader, see G.H. Russell, “Some Early Responses to the C-Version of *Piers Plowman*,” *Viator* 15 (1984): 275-300.

¹¹⁰ *PPL.*, XX ll.385-387.

Unity, “kynde” is invoked as an agent of restitution, Conscience sets out to seek the true Christian life as embodied in Piers, and as the dreamer awakes for the final time, there is a sense of his rubbing the sleep from his eyes, losing the blindness of Sloth and the specifically spiritual blindness of Haukyn, and clear-sightedly preparing to participate in the new beginning which is to occur just outside the confines of the text.¹¹¹

Both *Fasciculus morum* and *Piers Plowman* are concerned with the labour of Christian life, and provide instruction towards that end. However, whilst the former explicitly defines the mediating role of the clergy between the text and its ultimate beneficiaries, the latter is apparently self-contained. We cannot know for certain Langland’s original purpose in composing *Piers Plowman*, but the lack of any instructions for use may suggest that, although it could be mined for useful preaching and teaching material,¹¹² it was intended primarily for private reading, in order to exhort a primarily clerical readership to avoid sloth and do well, better and, if possible, best.

It is this self-containment, however, which rendered the work so suitable for subsequent appropriation by heterodox writers. Scase has observed that

Anticlericalism was as important for the reading as for the writing of *Piers Plowman*, if we may judge by the notes and comments medieval readers recorded in the margins of the manuscripts. Readers were interested in the full range of the poem’s anticlerical satire.¹¹³

In the absence of an integral apparatus to direct the reader through the text, it was left up

¹¹¹ Viewing *Piers Plowman* in an eschatological light, Peter has commented that “of all the poets, Langland seems to have been one of the few who could look forward to the ultimate catastrophe with anything like equanimity, probably because he thought of it in terms rather of the Second Coming than of punishment.” John Peter, *Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature* (Oxford, 1956), p.76. Whilst, as I shall attempt to show in the next chapter, the catastrophe which Langland depicts so vividly in his closing passus is, in fact, limited to the *ecclesia carnalis*, the absence of distress in the final lines is nonetheless a significant point. In shedding the blindness of sloth, the concomitant attribute of despair is also lost, thereby engendering a sense of spiritual hope in the face of earthly dissolution.

¹¹² See pp.51 and 90-91 below.

¹¹³ Wendy Scase, *Piers Plowman and the New Anticlericalism* (Cambridge, 1989), p.1.

to the reader to develop his own.¹¹⁴ I would suggest that whilst a clerical reader would recognise themes from pastoral literature and read anticlerical aspects of the work as reformist discourse within the prescribed institution of the Church, the lay reader, set outside this referential framework, would have a broad scope for misinterpretation of the text, whether wilful or accidental. The anticlericalism of *Piers Plowman* thereby ceases to be merely reformist, and acquires serious antisacerdotal implications. The nature of the anticlericalism in the poem will be discussed in the following chapter, but I shall first touch once more upon the transition between a clerical and a mixed audience.

Piers Plowman was long ago defined as a “product of the preacher’s art,”¹¹⁵ whilst in a study of the role of quotations in the poem, Alford has concluded that

One may argue...that Langland’s method of composition was more suited to the production of sermons than to the production of great poetry; yet his use of it is probably the most remarkable thing about his achievement. He adapted an old technique, moribund by the late fourteenth century, and infused it with a life and energy it rarely had in any medieval sermon and was never to have again.¹¹⁶

Langland, in making extensive use of a work such as *Fasciculus morum* as a source for his poem, could scarcely avoid the permeation of *Piers Plowman* with the flavour of sermon literature, and it is not impossible that elements of his text may have found their way into sermons themselves. Indeed, Barron has suggested that Langland, as a cleric himself, may well have made use of parts of his poem in the performance of his own pastoral duties.¹¹⁷

Hudson has argued convincingly that John Ball’s letter to the Essex commons required an audience familiar with “Peres Ploughman” and the exhortation to “do wel and bettre” in order to have effect, or even meaning,¹¹⁸ and it would seem likely that much of this initial

¹¹⁴ See above, p.49.

¹¹⁵ G.R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (revised Oxford, 1961), p.6.

¹¹⁶ John A. Alford, “The Role of the Quotations in *Piers Plowman*,” *Spec* 52 (1977): 99.

¹¹⁷ Barron, “London Poet,” pp.97-98.

¹¹⁸ Hudson, “Legacy of *Piers Plowman*,” p.252.

familiarity would be acquired with knowledge of, but without direct experience of, the text itself. Writing of the eighteenth century, Schofield has remarked that

it only needs one or two members of normally illiterate groups, who have acquired an ability to read, to read aloud to their friends and neighbours, for a bridge to be thrown across any supposed divide between exclusively literate and illiterate groups within society.¹¹⁹

This is equally applicable to the medieval period, in which the Church “spread the word along a continuum from literate to illiterate.”¹²⁰ Even those at the end of this continuum, although not themselves literate, were participating in literate culture, albeit indirectly:

They were made aware that a text lay behind a sermon and they were given an indirect understanding of the principles of authentication.¹²¹

However, once the text itself had become known directly to a lay readership, the intermediary role of the preacher became effectively redundant. In this new context, *Piers Plowman* acquired an authority which was almost certainly never intended, combining both the text and the preacher’s voice, the end result of which is remarkable not merely for its quality, but also for its transcendence of the bounds of sermon literature.¹²² It is a work which may be considered in relation to sermon reading by the laity,¹²³ but which does not fit neatly into any previously established genre. Furthermore, by the fifteenth century, it had come to speak with this voice not merely to the clerical readership to which sermon literature was originally addressed, but also to a readership of “prosperous, literate laymen.”

Langland, unlike, for example, Chaucer, is not mentioned by any of his contemporaries

¹¹⁹ R.S. Schofield, “The Measurement of Literacy in Pre-Industrial England,” in *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Jack Goody (Cambridge, 1968), pp.312-313.

¹²⁰ Stock, *Implications of Literacy*, p.152.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.91.

¹²² Indeed, in view of the function of much sermon literature to act as a guide to preachers, rather than to stand as completed works in their own right, Alford’s qualitative judgment is perhaps rather unfair.

¹²³ On private lay reading of sermons, see Spencer, *English Preaching*, pp.36ff.

or immediate followers.¹²⁴ Piers the ploughman, however, was to eclipse his creator in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, taking on a life of his own in a wide array of works which were, in some way, indebted to Langland.

Writing in the late nineteenth century, Skeat touched upon a common misunderstanding concerning the authorship of *Piers Plowman*:

Unfortunately, when Crowley put out his edition in 1550, he translated the Latin *de* by “of,” instead of “concerning,” and gave the book the ambiguous title of “The Vision of Pierce Plowman.” Hence careless readers at once jumped to the conclusion that Piers Plowman was the name of the *author*, not of the *subject*... There seems to be quite an attraction to this curious error.¹²⁵

It would appear, however, that this “curious error” was, in fact, current from a far earlier date. Two manuscripts of the A-text appear to credit Piers with authorship of the poem,¹²⁶ whilst the naming of “Per Plowman” amongst the rebel leaders of 1381 listed in the Dieulacres Abbey Chronicle grants to Piers a life beyond the confines of the work.¹²⁷ Later works, in particular *Pierce the Ploughman’s Crede* and *The Plowman’s Tale*, further endow Piers with a literary life beyond that which was bestowed upon him by Langland. The way in which this independent existence drastically altered the implications of Langland’s comments concerning the Church and the clergy will be discussed in chapters four to six, but before that it will be necessary to establish what *Piers Plowman* the poem has to say concerning the state of the Church in the fourteenth century.

¹²⁴ On Chaucer’s reputation in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, see J.A. Burrow (ed.), *Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Anthology* (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp.25-45; Derek Brewer (ed.), *Chaucer: The Critical Heritage* vol. 1 (London, 1978), pp.1-8 and 39-80.

¹²⁵ Introduction to William Langland, *The Vision of William Concerning Piers Plowman*, ed. W.W. Skeat (Oxford, 1886), vol. 2, p.xxiv.

¹²⁶ The manuscripts are The Library of the Society of Antiquaries MS 687 and British Library MS Harley 3954. These are discussed in Barr, *Signes and Sothe*, pp.8 and 17-18.

¹²⁷ The relevant passage from the Dieulacres Abbey Chronicle is printed in M.V. Clarke and V.H. Galbraith, “The Deposition of Richard II,” *BJRL* 14 (1930): 125-181. For the reference to “Iohannis B., Iak Strawe, Per Plowman,” see *ibid.*, p.164.

CHAPTER 3

THE NEW DANGER OF OLD ANTICLERICALISM IN *PIERS PLOWMAN*

In any reading of *Piers Plowman*, one feature which stands out is Langland's unsparing criticism of the clergy. The practices of the friars elicit the harshest censure, but no class of cleric escapes entirely. The expressive forms of Langland's anticlericalism may be traced to traditional complaints,¹ but Scase has argued that a new anticlerical impulse may be observed in *Piers Plowman*:

The old traditions of opposition to clerics were developed and unified in a new polemic which opposed all clerics. This was the essential strength and danger of the new anticlericalism.²

That Langland's "new anticlericalism" was indeed dangerous is evinced by the subsequent appropriation by later writers of anticlerical elements from his work. The works of the "*Piers Plowman* tradition" will be considered in detail below,³ but in the present chapter I shall first attempt to establish the implications of Langland's anticlericalism within the context of his own writing. It is only when the motivation behind Langland's criticisms of the clergy is understood that we may clearly assess the nature of the "danger" of his "new anticlericalism."

Grammer, the ground of al, bigileth now children:
For is noon of thise newe clerkes - whoso nymeth hede -
That kan versifye faire ne formaliche enditen,
Ne naught oon among an hundred that an auctour kan construwe,
Ne rede a lettre in any langage but in Latyn or in Englissh.
'Go now to any degree, and but if gile be maister,
And flaterere his felawe to fourmen under hym,
Muche wonder me thynketh amonges us alle!

¹ For an informative study of Langland's place in the tradition of antifraternel writing, see Penn R. Szittya, *The Antifraternel Tradition in Medieval Literature* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1986), pp.247-287.

² Scase, *Piers Plowman and the New Anticlericalism*, p.x.

³ See chapters 4-6. On my use of the term "*Piers Plowman* tradition," see p.29, n.1.

Doctours of decrees and of divinite maistres,
 That sholde konne and knowe alle kynnes clergie,
 And answer to arguments and also to a *quodlibet* -
 I dar noght siggen it for shame - if swiche were apposed,
 Thei sholde failen of hir Philosophie, and in Phisik bothe.
 'Wherefore I am afered of folk of Holy Kirke,
 Lest thei overhuppen, as oothere doon, in Office and in Houres.
 Ac if thei overhuppe - as I hope noght - oure bileve suffiseth;
 As clerkes in Corpus Christi feeste synge and reden
 That *sola fides sufficit* to save with lewed peple -
 And so may Sarsens be saved, scribes and Jewes.⁴

With these words, which occur in what is perhaps the most broadly anticlerical passus of *Piers Plowman*, Anima roundly attacks clerical claims to learning. He pre-dates Trevisa's concern at the disappearance of French from common usage,⁵ in favour of the more limited options of "Latyn or...Englissh." More significant, however, is the low level of Latin literacy displayed by a clergy who, although possessing the ability to "rede a lettre," may not "an auctour...construe,"⁶ thereby touching upon a tradition of complaint against clerical illiteracy which gained momentum throughout the fourteenth century.

The tenth decree of the Fourth Lateran council had, amongst its list of reasons why a bishop may be unable adequately to fulfil his preaching duties, included the stern warning against

defectum scientiæ, quod in eis est reprobandum omnino, nec de cetero tolerandum.⁷

[deficiency of learning, in them a most grievous fault, not to be tolerated in future.]

In England, as early as the thirteenth century, Grosseteste had found it necessary to instruct illiterate clerics to ask for assistance from literate neighbours,⁸ and had indeed found it

⁴ *PPL.*, B XV ll.370-388.

⁵ See above, p.21.

⁶ The scope of the "Doctours of decrees and of divinite maistres" to which Anima refers is broadened still further in the C-text by the addition of the more general phrase "this prestes." *PPL.*, C XVII l.117. All references to the C-Text are taken from William Langland, *Piers Plowman: The C-Text*, ed. Derek Pearsall (reprint, Exeter, 1994).

⁷ *Concilium Lateranense IV*, p.998.

⁸ Margaret Deanesly, *A History of the Medieval Church: 590-1500* (reprint, London, 1978), p.198.

necessary to reject the institution of candidates into vacant livings on numerous occasions, often against the will of powerful patrons, for reasons of illiteracy: one W. De Grana, for example, was not appointed to a cure of souls on account of being “*literaturæ minus sufficientis*,”⁹ and numerous similar instances are recorded in his collected letters.¹⁰ It is, of course, important to bear in mind that the medieval notion of illiteracy had different implications than the modern usage of the word, for one could be fluent in vernacular languages, yet not be considered *litteratus* unless one had at least a minimal ability to read Latin.¹¹ The clergy is effectively separated by inadequate literacy from the authority of God's law which, as we are reminded towards the close of the passus, “oure Lord wroot...hymselfe/ In stoon.”¹² The implication is clearly that the clergy are not equipped to fulfil the mediatory, interpretative role of making the written Word of God known to the laity which is their prescribed function.¹³

Although, as has been noted above, this complaint had become commonplace, it should be noted that it does not necessarily mirror the actual situation in England (or,

⁹ Roberti Grosseteste, *Epistolae*, ed. Henry Richards Luard (London, 1861), p.63.

¹⁰ See, for example, *ibid.*, pp.50-54, 68-69 & 203-204. On Grosseteste's views on the necessity of a well-educated clergy, see J.H. Strawley, “Grosseteste's Administration of the Diocese of Lincoln,” in *Robert Grosseteste: Scholar and Bishop*, ed. Daniel Angelo Philip Callus (Oxford, 1955): 168-170. Pantin has compared the career of Grosseteste with Langland's “Do-Best,” embodying “the life of the good bishop, which crowns both the active and the contemplative life:” W.A. Pantin, “Grosseteste's Relations with the Papacy and the Crown,” in *Grosseteste*, ed. Callus, p.178. On the influence of Grosseteste's views, including those on the primacy of effective pastoral care, in the late fourteenth and fifteenth century, see R.W. Southern, *Robert Grosseteste: The Growth of an English Mind in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 1986), pp.296-322.

¹¹ Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, pp.226-230.

¹² *PPL*, B XV ll.580-581. My italics.

¹³ Machan cites the syntactically complex bilingualism which permeates *Piers Plowman* - particularly prominent in the speeches of Patience and Anima - to define the text as “a site of the demise of diglossia in Medieval England:” Tim William Machan, “Language Contact in *Piers Plowman*,” *Spec* 69 (1994): 380. However, whilst there is indeed a marked overlap between the “once functionally specialized and complementary” languages of Latin and English (*ibid.*, p.360), *Piers Plowman* merely “portends the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century emergence of the vernacular in powerful domains” (*ibid.*, p.385): during this period, Latin retained (however precariously) its institutionally sanctioned authoritative status.

indeed, Europe) with any accuracy. Murray has found clerical education throughout the fourteenth century to have improved, and has suggested that criticism was born from a situation in which an increasing number of qualified men were competing for a static number of positions:

The cry for reform in respect of clerical ignorance did not grow louder because it grew worse. It grew louder because the circles swelled which were professionally sensitive in this particular: namely circles of university men, anxious for a living.¹⁴

Indeed, although Langland himself chose to write predominantly in English, he nevertheless anticipated that his audience would understand, and respond to, the Latin quotations which appear so frequently throughout his work: a bilingual readership is both desired and, we may assume, expected.

The situation is, however, more complex, as the need for learning is apparently undermined by Anima's reassurance that "*sola fides sufficit* to save with lewed peple." Scase has suggested that in this passage,

Neither the learned nor the ignorant are defended; instead, an antisacerdotal view of salvation is suggested. Anima asserts that salvation is independent of priestly efficacy, for even non-Christians may be saved.¹⁵

I would argue, however, that this is not the case, and that, regardless of interpretations placed upon the work by later readers, from fifteenth-century laymen to modern critics, Langland's intention was in no way antisacerdotal. Whilst Scase rightly offers the example of pastoral literature as an instance of the erosion of boundaries between clerical and lay audiences, she fails to consider that *Piers Plowman* itself may be such a work which crossed the boundary into the lay domain purely as a result of social circumstance, rather than authorial intention.

Learning, in itself, is not criticised, merely the false pretensions of clerics who make

¹⁴ Alexander Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1978), p.309.

¹⁵ Scase, *Piers Plowman and the New Anticlericalism*, p.44.

claims to learning but are found wanting when “apposed.”¹⁶ Indeed, it is the very lack of learning which, as noted above, Anima deplores. Whilst the principle *sola fides sufficit* has potential antisacerdotal implications, the context of this quotation makes such an intention appear unlikely. At the culmination of a passage in which falling standards of clerical literacy are criticised, the inclusion of a quotation taken from a great “maistre,” given in Latin, is particularly pointed, and surely addresses clerics themselves.¹⁷

Faith alone may indeed suffice for the salvation of “lewed peple...Sarsens...and Jewes,” but the imperfect cleric is conspicuous by his absence from the list of those who may be saved in this way. If taken in isolation, Anima’s statement may appear to border upon antisacerdotalism, but this view is modified in the light of his following exclamation:

Allas thanne! but oure looresmen lyve as thei leren us,
And for hir lyvyng that lewed men be lother God agulten.¹⁸

Although the speech is highly critical of those who “overhuppen...in Office and in Houres,”¹⁹ the importance of the example of a reformed clergy is explicitly reinforced: indeed, the example of *sola fides sufficit* is, as has been noted, expressly associated with the dissemination of doctrinal orthodoxy at the feast of Corpus Christi by “clerkes” themselves. Langland here, therefore, appears to be, as Gradon has commented with reference to the discussion of the sacrament of penance in *Piers Plowman*, “making a debating point to

¹⁶ The issue of Langland’s attitude towards literacy is discussed in Wendy Scase, “Writing and the Plowman: Langland and Literacy,” *YLS* 9 (1995): 121-131. Scase notes that the practices and processes of literacy are questioned throughout *Piers Plowman*, and are only legitimated by their association with good works: *ibid.*, p.126.

¹⁷ The phrase is taken from the hymn *Pange lingua gloriosi / Corporis mysterium*, written by Thomas Aquinas. That this Corpus Christi hymn affirms the doctrine of transubstantiation lends further support to the reading of this passage in an emphatically orthodox light.

¹⁸ *PPL*, B XV ll.389-390.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, B XV l.385.

which his protagonists provide a perfectly orthodox answer.”²⁰

It should be remembered that although the individual will of the Christian may, *in extremis*, suffice for salvation, the notion of penance itself is intrinsically defined within the institutional framework of the Church. In the previous passus, Patience had noted that

... though a man myghte noght speke, contricion myghte hym save,
And brynge his soule to blisse, by so that feith bere witnesse
That whiles he lyvede he bilevede in the loore of Holy Chirche.
Ergo contricion, feith and conscience is kyndeliche Dowel,
And surgiens for dedly synnes whan shrift of mouthe failleth.
Ac shrift of mouth moore worthi is, if man be ynliche contrit,
For shrift of mouthe sleeth synne be it never so dedly -
Per confessionem to a preest *peccata occiduntur* -
Ther contricion dooth but dryveth it doun into a venial synne.²¹

The apparent paradox, by which contrition alone is first said to save the penitent and then, in the same speech, merely to reduce the gravity of the sin, is resolved by reference to the will of the individual. Contrition may be defined as “sorrow for sins voluntarily assumed with the intention of confessing and doing satisfaction.”²² The truly contrite penitent will, by definition, desire to make oral confession to a priest, and this intention alone will be sufficient if, for any reason, he “myghte noght speke.”

Since the decree *Omnis utriusque sexus* of the fourth Lateran Council, annual confession to a priest had been enshrined in canon law, although this had merely affirmed existing practice or, at least, theory.²³ Whilst this need was not expressly prescribed in

²⁰ Pamela Gradon, “Langland and the Ideology of Dissent,” *PBA* 66 (1980): 193. In assessing the attitude expressed towards the Church throughout *Piers Plowman* within a broader context of contemporary debate than the specifically Wycliffite discourse with which it is frequently compared, Gradon’s article puts forward a strong case for the orthodoxy of Langland’s reformism. This view is supported by Hudson, who firmly locates the poem in an era in which “many issues were still open and to express a view was not immediately to invite classification as pro- or anti-Wycliffite” (Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, p.398), and it is a view with which the present thesis fully concurs.

²¹ *Ibid.*, B XIV ll.84-95.

²² Tentler cites the occurrence of this definition in numerous penitential treatises. Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, 1977), p.235. This point is also made in Greta Hort, *Piers Plowman and Contemporary Religious Thought* (London, 1977), p.138.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp.21-22.

Scripture, it was generally taken to be implicit in the New Testament, in addresses made by Christ to the original priesthood, His apostles,²⁴ and although the necessity of the role of the priest in confession - the fate of the sinner dying without confession due to the absence of a priest, for example - was debated, the very existence of this debate evinces the importance accorded to oral confession.²⁵

It is this same principle which governs Anima's speech. However, although the will of the individual may suffice for salvation if the priest is negligent, Langland here focuses specifically upon the necessity of the role of the priest, for it is his duty to instruct the laity sufficiently to shape their faith:

*Sicut de templo omne bonum progreditur, sic de templo omne malum procedit.
Si sacerdocium integrum fuerit, tota floret ecclesia; si autem corruptum fuerit,
omnium fides marcida est.*²⁶

[Just as all good comes out of the temple, so does all evil. If the priesthood has integrity, the whole Church flourishes; but if it is corrupt, the faithful as a whole wither up.]

Sola fides sufficit, but this faith, as has been noted, may not be learnt by the laity without the offices of the clergy. Far from expressing antisacerdotal tendencies, Langland is merely addressing those amongst his audience who perform their duties "with ydel wille,"²⁷ and is calling for their reform in accordance with the ideal principles of the founders of the religious orders.²⁸ He does not attack learning *per se*, but false claims to learning when all

²⁴ In particular, Matthew 16.19, in which Christ says to Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom; and whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be loosed in heaven," and John 20.22-23, in which Christ empowers His apostles with the words, "Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."

²⁵ The debate concerning the relative values of contrition and oral confession is discussed in Hort, *Piers Plowman and Contemporary Religious Thought*, pp.130-155. Hort argues that Langland supports the notion that "the sins of a baptized person are erased through contrition and contrition alone," (*ibid.*, p.149) a view with which, for reasons stated above, I would disagree.

²⁶ *PPL*, B XV l.118.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, B XV l.127.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, B XV ll.415-424.

that is specifically required is the ability to instruct the laity in the rudiments of the faith.²⁹

In the last chapter, Haukyn was considered as a type of imperfect Christian, failing to perform the right kind of “work.” In passus XV, Langland turns his attention to the work of the Church itself, who gives to Haukyn no spiritual sustenance, but a mere “pardon with a peis of leed and two polles amyddes.”³⁰ These two “polles” are the heads of Saints Peter and Paul, which represent the authoritative lineage of the papal seal, yet by his dismissive reference to the material “peis of leed,” Langland subtly implies a diminution of spiritual value in the same manner as his later remarks upon the spiritual devaluation of the symbol of the cross as a result of its impression upon coins.³¹ By the fourteenth century, the value of indulgences was being widely called into question, and the extreme stance taken by Langland upon this issue is indicated at the outset of the poem in the metaphorical violence of the pardoner who

bonched hem with his brevet and blered hire eighen,
And raughte with his rageman rynges and broches.³²

The metaphor of the charlatan who “blinds” his victims in the pursuance of personal material gain is far from new,³³ but, as we have seen, the notion of blindness in *Piers Plowman* has a profound spiritual resonance. Clerics, in their laxity, may, therefore, be seen as blinding the laity to their Christian duty by offering confession and apparent restitution without

²⁹ *Ibid.*, B XV ll.568ff.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, B XIII l.246.

³¹ *Ibid.*, B XV ll.536-545. The cross/coin image is a commonplace satirical device. See John A. Yunck, *The Lineage of Lady Meed* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1963), pp.177 & 256; *Fasciculus morum*, p.448. On Langland’s use of coin imagery, see Margaret E. Goldsmith, *The Figure of Piers Plowman: The Image on the Coin* (Cambridge, 1981), pp.10, 11, 23-26, 33, 73, *et passim*.

³² *PPL.*, B Prologue ll.74-75.

³³ The physician in *The Simonie*, for example, will first “biginne to blere þe wiues eiȝe,” before enumerating his extortionate expenses. *The Simonie: A Parallel-Text Edition*, ed. Dan Embree and Elizabeth Urquhart (Heidelberg, 1991), A l.223.

requiring true contrition, without which they are rendered meaningless.³⁴

As Gray has noted,

It is in this substitution of an attractively easy, mechanistic alternative for the arduous demands of the sacrament...that the pardoner's perversion of penance essentially consists: and it is a serious perversion, for, as Langland warns at the climax of the *Visio*, trust in 'triennals,' 'pardon and þe popes bulles,' 'provincials lettres' and 'indulgences doublefold' - the painless apparent alternative to having to 'do well' - may prove vain 'At þe dredful dome.'³⁵

Although pardoners were generally clerics, Langland's pardoner is said to preach "as he a preest were."³⁶ Whilst this initially suggests that he is perhaps an impostor, and contemporary records do refer to the illicit activities of unlicensed pardoners,³⁷ I feel that this applies more generally to the notion of duplicity in the Church. In the same way that pretension to clerical learning is attacked in Anima's speech, so this early reference to false pardons addresses pretensions to priestly activity, thereby defining a split between the ideal and the actual which persists in subsequent discussion of the clergy throughout the poem. The pardoner himself is merely a recently established figure - what Yunck has termed "the latest swindler in the religious life of the parish" - who provides a pertinently up-to-date example of contemporary corruption.³⁸ It is the false claims to authority which are criticised by Langland - the "words" which are not borne out by "works."

There are, it must be conceded, many within Langland's vision of society who follow the precepts of ideal Christianity:

³⁴ The opposite effect is displayed in *PPL* B XVIII ll.78-91, in which Langland recounts the apocryphal tale of the blind soldier Longinus, who is granted sight through virtue of the blood of Christ. It is significant that Christ, in this instance, is closely linked with Piers. On the nature of this relationship, see below.

³⁵ Gray, "A Study of *Piers Plowman* in Relation to the Medieval Penitential Tradition," p.375.

³⁶ *PPL*, B Prologue l.68.

³⁷ Examples are reproduced in Edith Rickert, *Chaucer's World* (London, 1948), p.379.

³⁸ Yunck, *Lineage of Lady Meed*, p.302. Chaucer, too, would later use the figure of a pardoner in the same way. Indeed, Chaucer perhaps emphasises Langland's use of the figure, making of his Pardoner what Aers has referred to as "a scapegoat for the massive problems and anxieties in the late medieval Church:" David Aers, *Chaucer* (Brighton, 1986), p.50.

In preieres and penaunce putten hem manye,
Al for the love of Oure Lord lyveden ful streyte
In hope to have heveneriche blisse.³⁹

However, these are rarely to be found within the institution of the Church, and the apocalyptic close of the poem is prefigured early in the anticlericalism of the prologue. The first anticlerical outburst is, perhaps unsurprisingly, directed at the friars,⁴⁰ but although the warning,

But Holy Chirche and hii holde bettere togidres
The mooste meschief on molde is mountynge up faste,⁴¹

is specifically antifraternial, it resonates throughout the broader anticlericalism of the lines which follow, encompassing not only the friars, but also pardoners, the parochial clergy and bishops.⁴² Furthermore, by the very nature of the role of clerics in administering to the laity, this “meschief,” if it is not eradicated by clerical reform, must necessarily spread throughout the whole of society, for

As holynesse and honeste out of Holy Chirche spreadeth
Thorough lele libbynge men that Goddes lawe techen,
Right so out of Holy Chirche alle yvelles spreadeth
There inparfit preesthode is, prechours and techeris.⁴³

In this context, it is possible to see that although a contrite layman may benefit from the pardons of the corrupt institution, the clergy who undermine the integrity of the Church may not. Consequently, Will's waking reflection that “Dowel at the Day of Dome is digneliche underfongen / And passeth al the pardon of Seint Petres cherche,”⁴⁴ may be read

³⁹ *PPL.*, B Prologue ll.25-27.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, B Prologue ll.58ff. On contemporary antifraternism, see chapter One above.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, B Prologue ll.66-67.

⁴² *Ibid.*, B Prologue ll.68-99.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, B XV ll.92-95.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, B VII ll.172-173.

as a salutary warning to the clerics who “kan no pardon fynde”⁴⁵ in the code of Christian behaviour prescribed by Truthe, exemplified by Piers the Plowman and characterised by “lele libbynge.”

Upon considering the extent of Langland’s anticlericalism, the reader’s attention is so strongly drawn to the abuses and shortcomings of those who manipulate the system for personal gain, that it is possible to lose sight entirely of the Church as an entity in its own right. Whilst Langland obviously displays a deep concern with the (mal)practices of his day, in order to understand the implications of his anticlericalism, it is necessary to look beyond these human failings and to consider the way in which he presents Holy Church within the poem.

The vision experienced by Will in the prologue of *Piers Plowman* offers him a comprehensive view of his society through the allegorical plan of tower, field and dale,⁴⁶ the fable of the rats,⁴⁷ and the apparently realistic description of the crowded city.⁴⁸ Yet he is not, at this point, *of* this society; his dream state has placed him in a “wildernesse” where he is only an observer of the pageant of human activity set before him.⁴⁹ Thus granted this objective vision, Will’s desire for wonders is fulfilled as the familiar activities of human life

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, B VII l.111. Simpson touches upon this in observing that the tearing of the pardon in Passus VII simultaneously affirms the nature of true pardon by merit and attacks current abuses of the system of pardons. James Simpson, *Piers Plowman: An Introduction to the B-Text* (London, 1990), p.74. For an overview of earlier readings of the much-disputed significance of the tearing of the pardon, see Rosemary Woolf, “The Tearing of the Pardon,” in *Piers Plowman: Critical Approaches*, ed. S.S. Hussey (London, 1969), pp.50-75.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, B Prologue ll.13-19ff.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, B Prologue ll.146ff.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, B Prologue ll.211ff.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, B Prologue l.12. It is not until Will’s sequence of revelatory visions is completed that he may return to, and fully participate in, the wider world which exists outside the framework of the poem. The idle desire to experience “wondres” is transformed into a more focused purpose: “‘By Crist!’ quod Conscience tho, ‘I wole bicom a pilgrym / And walken as wide as the world lasteth / To seken Piers the Plowman.’” *Ibid.*, B XX ll.381-383.

become confusing, their meaning obscured.

Although speech is reported throughout the prologue, it is not until Will is confronted by the “lovely lady of leere in lynnyn yclothed,”⁵⁰ who descends from the castle, that he becomes engaged with any of the figures he has observed. The reader, familiar with dream-vision convention, expects this figure to act as some sort of guide to the narrator,⁵¹ and this is duly the pattern that begins to unfold. The narrator, bemused by that which is before him, asks “what may this be to mene?”⁵² and, in accordance with his desire, he is given an explanation filled with sufficient insight to make the narrator curious as to the identity of his informant. A similar encounter, with which it is instructive to compare Will’s meeting with Lady Holy Church, may be found in the *Roman de la Rose*:

En cest point ai grant piece esté,
Tant que me vit ensi maté
La dame de la haute angarde,
Qui de sa tor aval esgarde...

Lors est de sa tor devalee,
Si est tot droit a moi venue.

(Elle) Bien ressembloit haute persone.
A son semblant e a son vis
Pert qu’el fu faite en parevis,
Car Nature ne seüst pas
Uevre faire de tel compas.
Sachiez, se la lettre ne ment,
Que Deus la fist demainement,
A sa semblance e a s’image,
E li dona tel avantage
Qu’ele a pooir e seignorie
De garder ome de folie.⁵³

[I was in this state for a long time, until the lady who looks down from her tower saw, from her observation-point, that I was thus downcast...she then came down from her tower and came straight to me...she looked like a person of high estate. By her appearance and her face it seemed that she was made in paradise, for Nature

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, B I l.3.

⁵¹ Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, p.4.

⁵² *PPL.*, B I l.11.

⁵³ Guillaume de Lorris et Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Ernest Langlois (Paris, 1922), ll.2971-2994.

would not have known how to make a work of such regularity. Know, if the letter does not lie, that God made her personally in His likeness and in His image and gave her such advantage that she has the power and the lordship to keep man from folly.]⁵⁴

The appearance of the female figure to Will is highly reminiscent of the above lines from Guillaume de Lorris' section of the *Roman de la Rose*,⁵⁵ in which Reason appears to the narrator in order to offer guidance. As Friedman has noted, Reason, in the work of Guillaume de Lorris,

is merely the conventional personification of a moment in the love process: transformed by Jean de Meung, she becomes the proponent of several doctrines of rational love drawn from Boethius, Cicero, and the Bible.⁵⁶

Although Reason remains but an allegorical voice, both Guillaume and Jean (as distinct from their fictional narrators) appear to accord to her an elevated sense of moral authority - she is, after all "the daughter of God" - the continued rejection of whom leads to the ultimate triumph of the carnal within the poem.⁵⁷

Langland, too, employs this same elevated notion of personified Reason, who is first introduced as the one who "sholde rule yow alle."⁵⁸ However, the guide which he provides

⁵⁴ Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Charles Dahlberg (London, 1971), ll.2971-2994. Although refusing to commit herself on the issue of specific influence, Owen has noted many similarities between the allegorical strategies of *The Roman de la Rose* (Jean de Meun's continuation in particular) and *Piers Plowman*. Dorothy L. Owen, *Piers Plowman: A Comparison with Some Earlier and Contemporary French Allegories* (London, 1912), pp.21-22 *et passim*.

⁵⁵ Jean de Meun, in his continuation, repeats the motif of Reason's descent to the dreamer. *Ibid.*, ll.4221-4228.

⁵⁶ Lionel J. Friedman, "'Jean de Meung,' Antifeminism, and 'Bourgeois Realism,'" *Modern Philology* 57 (1959-1960): 16. For sources of Reason's philosophy of love, see Charles Dahlberg, "Love and the *Roman de la Rose*," *Spec* 44 (1969): 570-572.

⁵⁷ *Romance of the Rose*, l.5818. The rejection of Reason culminates in the narrator's final, disparaging dismissal, "I didn't remember Reason, who gave me a lot of trouble for nothing" ("de Raison ne me souvint / Qui tant en mei gasta de peine"): *Ibid.*, ll.21760-21761. A full investigation of the undeniably problematic issue of the interpretation of Jean's Reason lies outside the scope of the present thesis. Fleming, in propounding his own interpretation of Reason as the only authority to be trusted in the poem, addresses the arguments both *pro* and *contra* this reading: John V. Fleming, *Reason and the Lover* (Princeton, 1984).

⁵⁸ *PPl.*, B I l.54. On Langland's conception of reason, see John A. Alford, "The Idea of Reason in *Piers Plowman*," in *Medieval Studies Presented to George Kane*, ed. Edward Donald Kennedy *et al* (Woodbridge, 1988), pp.199-215.

for Will is possessed with still higher spiritual authority, for she reveals herself to be “Holi Chirche,”⁵⁹ the allegorical figure of the “woman of most noble figure and most splendidly clothed” (*mulier nobilissima corpore et habitu decentissime ornata*) representative of *Ecclesia* throughout the middle ages.⁶⁰

Throughout *Piers Plowman*, Reason acts as a moral adviser, notably adopting the role of the preacher in order to exhort the folk of the field to adopt the Christian way of life which constitutes the pilgrimage to “Seynt Truthe,”⁶¹ and it is said that he who will not work towards his own spiritual sustenance “greveth hym ageyn God and gruccheth ageyn Reson.”⁶² This firmly places Reason at the head of man's earthly faculties, subservient only to the divine. Yet, as Will observes,

Reson rewarded and ruled alle beestes
Save man and his make: many tyme and ofte
No Reson hem folwede.⁶³

Like the narrator of the *Roman de la Rose*, he is aware of his prerogative to ignore Reason. Indeed, from the point at which Reason is introduced into the trial of Lady Mede, the necessity for individual consent in order to accord Reason its due value in human affairs is made apparent:

“I comaunde thee,” quod the Kyng to Conscience thanne,
“Rape thee to ryde, and Reson that thow fecche.
Comaunde hym that he come my counseil to here,

⁵⁹ *PPL.*, B I l.75.

⁶⁰ *Fasciculus morum*, p.362. The figure was also frequently depicted in medieval art, such as the sculptured figure on the Chapter Room door jamb at Rochester Cathedral, which is roughly contemporary with Langland. A fine earlier example is the late-thirteenth century figure on the south porch of the Lincoln Cathedral “Angel Choir.”

⁶¹ *PPL.*, B V ll.9-59.

⁶² *Ibid.*, B VI l.315.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, B XI ll.368-370. The question of Langland's apparent attribution of reason to animals in these lines is discussed in A.V.C. Schmidt, “Langland and Scholastic Philosophy,” *MAE* 38 (1969): 145-150 and Alford, “Idea of Reason,” pp.210-212. For the present discussion, however, it is sufficient to note that Reason's dominion over man is seen to be dependent upon individual choice.

For he shal rule my reaume and rede me the beste
Of Mede and of mo othere, what man shal hire wedde,
And acounte with thee, Conscience, so me Crist helpe,
How thow lernest the peple, the lered and the lewed!”⁶⁴

Reason is presented as the highest earthly arbiter who, in accordance with Conscience, shall be the instructor of all men, both “the lered and the lewed.”⁶⁵ In spite of this, however, the King may still unthinkingly “comaunde” Reason (and Conscience), whilst casually continuing to refer to “*my reaume*.” Although superficially asserting the supremacy of Reason, the King's language reveals an unquestioned buttressing of his own dominion.

Reason's own words, in turn, continue to express his practical subservience to human desires. He lays down a rigid, direct scheme for social and, most emphatically, spiritual reform,⁶⁶ but is forced to end his tirade with a tacit acknowledgement of impotence if not invoked by his superior:

“I seye it by myself,” quod he, “and it so were
That I were kyng with coroune to kepen a reaume,
Sholde nevere Wrong in this world that I wite myghte
Ben unpunysshed in my power, for peril of my soule,
Ne gete my grace thorough giftes, so me God save!”⁶⁷

For all the venom of his speech, Reason is not a “kyng with coroune,” and may only implement his solutions to the problem of Wrong if employed by the King or, more generally, man. The passus closes with Reason, along with his necessary companion Conscience, becoming advisers to the King, thereby cementing the best possible alliance, albeit one in which the King, by his very nature, retains the upper hand.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ *PPl.*, B IV ll.6-12.

⁶⁵ In this role of instructor, it is significant that at the opening passus V Reason is the cleric who preaches to “al the reaume,” and thereby initiates the confession of the Sins: *ibid.*, B V l.11.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, B IV ll.113-135. Indeed, Reason's programme of reform, lacking as it is in “*ruthe*,” is altogether too rigid when it is not tempered by Conscience.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, B IV ll.137-141.

⁶⁸ Alford interprets the summoning of Reason as denoting the exemplary behaviour of the king according to contemporary legal theory, suggesting that, “this allegorical action... underscores an important legal doctrine. In

In the same way, Will, too reaches the realisation that he is wrong to dispute with Reason,⁶⁹ thereby enabling himself to progress further upon his own spiritual pilgrimage.⁷⁰ Yet this realisation is not an end in itself, for whilst Reason may influence the “werchyng and wandryng” of the field of folk,⁷¹ it is only Holi Chirche, for Langland a more fitting claimant to the epithet “daughter of God,”⁷² who may imbue it with meaning and guide the way to perfection:

Thanne I courbed on my knees and cried hire of grace,
And preide hire pitously to preye for my synnes,
And also kenne me kyndely on Crist to bileve,
That I myghte werchen His wille that wroghte me to man:
“Teche me to no tresor, but tel me this ilke -
How I may save my soule, that seint art yholden.”⁷³

Will's discovery of Holi Chirche's identity provokes a response which contains many elements which are to resonate throughout the poem, but perhaps the most important aspect is the unequivocal deference which is accorded to the Church. His initial response to the (then unknown) figure is a mixture of both attraction and fear - “I was afered of hire face, theigh she faire weere,”⁷⁴ - which gives way to complete subjection as soon as he becomes aware of her identity. That this occurs without the slightest hesitancy or, indeed, irony is an

his office as judge, the medieval king functions primarily as an agent of reason. Law is reason (*lex est ratio*), and whatever is not reason is not law. ‘Human law has the nature of law in so far as it partakes of right reason.... But in so far as it deviates from reason, it is called an unjust law, and has the nature, not of law but of violence’ (Aquinas); and ‘when the will of the prince deviates from equity, justice and reason, it is not law’ (Lucas de Penna).” Alford, “Idea of Reason,” pp.206-207. However, I would suggest that the word “comaunde” in *Piers Plowman* is used to emphasise the potential primacy of the will over reason.

⁶⁹ *PPL*, B XI l.403.

⁷⁰ This is in contrast to the outright rejection of Reason in the *Roman de la Rose*, which leaves the narrator “pensive and sad,” (“pensif e mourne:” *Romance of the Rose*, l.7229); this is precisely the situation in which he had first been discovered. Although the quest for the rose continues, this rejection effectively precludes the possibility of spiritual advancement.

⁷¹ *PPL*, B Prologue l.19.

⁷² Indeed, she refers to herself as God’s “goode doughter.” *Ibid.*, B II l.30.

⁷³ *PPL*, B I ll.79-84.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, B I l.10.

important point in any reading of the poem, for it should always be borne in mind that whatever clerical failings may be indignantly recorded by Langland, he is, from the very beginning, prepared to place his narrator's entire trust in Holi Chirche herself.

In Langland's personification of the figure of Holi Chirche as a distinct entity may be seen a reflection of the long-standing distinction between the historically idealized simplicity of the Church of the Apostles and the elaborate, hierarchical *ecclesia carnalis* of the later middle ages.⁷⁵ Although in itself an established orthodox reformist standpoint, the schism within the Franciscan order in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries had demonstrated how such an approach could lead to "a chain reaction from doctrinal division to open heresy."⁷⁶ Langland's constant emphasis upon reform, rather than opposition,⁷⁷ however, suggests that the spiritual Church remains an attainable presence even in the face of contemporary corruption; it has been overshadowed, rather than supplanted, by the *ecclesia carnalis*. In the same way, although Holi Chirche recedes from view early in the poem, she remains implicitly present as a guide, in that she provides a directional impetus for Will and, in turn, the reader.⁷⁸ In consequence of this continued presence, Langland's

⁷⁵ M.D. Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from Bogomil to Hus* (London, 1977), p.46. On the development and implications of the notion of the ideal Church in opposition to the devalued contemporary church in the later middle ages, see Gordon Leff, "The Apostolic Ideal in Later Medieval Ecclesiology," *JTS* n.s. 18 (1967): 58-82.

⁷⁶ Gordon Leff, *Heresy in the Middle Ages* vol.1 (Manchester, 1967), p.51. For the development of the controversy, see M.D. Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty* (London, 1961), pp.149-183.

⁷⁷ For example, in spite of pervasive antifraternality, Langland's final word on the matter, in *PPL*, B XX l.384, is a reasonable suggestion of reform, asking "that freres hadde a fyndyng, that for nede flateren." It should be noted that in the C-text the initial reformist tone is somewhat harsher; B Prologue l.67, "But Holy Chirche and hii holde bettre togidres," becomes in C Prologue l.64, "but holi chirche and charite choppe adoun suche shryuars." However, the reasonable reformist tone at the close of the poem remains unchanged at C XXII l.382.

⁷⁸ For an opposing view, see Colette Murphy, "Lady Holy Church and Meed the Maid: Re-envisioning Female Personifications in *Piers Plowman*," in *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature: The Wife of Bath and All Her Sect*, ed. Ruth Evans and Lesley Johnson (London, 1994): 140-164. Murphy concludes that "the depiction of Holy Church in female form serves...a number of functions, but the tensions between them limit her usefulness as a guide figure." Given Holi Chirche's direction of Will towards all he needs to know, I would not consider her "usefulness as a guide figure" to be in any way limited.

wish for the clergy to return to their pristine state appears less overtly nostalgic.⁷⁹ That the notion of an urgent need for repristination of the Church could provide the foundation for a wide range of doctrinally divergent opinions is undeniable,⁸⁰ but throughout *Piers Plowman* this pervasive authority of uncorrupted Holi Chirche is never called into question.

That which is asked of Holi Chirche may be summarised simply; Will wishes to learn how to be a good Christian. The specific elements of this instruction, however, are themes which are discussed throughout the poem, and which I have already touched upon to some extent in the previous chapter. He wishes the Church to take an intercessory role regarding his sins, he wishes to have faith in Christ “kyndely,”⁸¹ and he wishes to work the will of God.⁸² The desired end product of this instruction is explicitly stated in an emphatic transition from indirect to direct speech: Will's single aim is the salvation of his soul.⁸³

As one may expect in such a direct confrontation, the reply which Will receives is succinct:

“Whan alle tresors arn tried,” quod she, “Treuthe is the beste.
I do it on *Deus caritas* to deme the sothe;
It is as dereworthe a drury as deere God hymselven.

⁷⁹ “*Ad pristinum statum ire:*” PPL., B X 1.317. As Kerby-Fulton has commented, “although Langland's apocalyptic reformism is not entirely backward-looking, there is a strong vein of yearning for past glory in his thought.” Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism and Piers Plowman*, p.188.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.175.

⁸¹ White, in this instance, defines “kyndely” as “properly,” stating that “any refinement as to the origin or specific character of that belief such as might be conveyed if we were to take *kyndely* as ‘naturally’ seems inappropriate.” White, *Nature and Salvation in Piers Plowman*, pp.43-44. Whilst accepting the possibility of this interpretation, I fail to see the “inappropriateness” of the word “naturally,” and would be inclined to agree with Coleman that this suggests that Will “wants to acquire faith through the use of his own powers, and consequently he wants to know what *he* must do to save his soul.” Coleman, *Piers Plowman and the Moderni*, p.45. One is reminded once more of the *Fasciculus morum* image of man's natural faculties (five senses and memory) drawing the “ploughshare of confession.” see p.44 above.

⁸² As I shall discuss below, it is important to bear in mind that, for Langland's narrator, being a good Christian and working the will of God must of necessity involve an acknowledgement of his responsibilities as a cleric, and of those same responsibilities shared by his intended audience.

⁸³ See Elizabeth Salter, *Piers Plowman: An Introduction* (Oxford, 1962), p.8; S.S. Hussey (ed.), *Piers Plowman: Critical Approaches* (London, 1969), p.15; Hort, *Piers Plowman and Contemporary Religious Thought*, pp.20-22.

Who is trewe of his tonge and telleth noon oother,
And dooth the werkes therwith and wilneth no man ille,
He is a god by the Gospel, agrounde and olofte,
And ylik to Oure Lord, by Seint Lukes wordes.⁸⁴

This guide to Christian life is expanded throughout the remainder of the passus, and is explored throughout the poem as a whole, but the key elements are all contained within these few lines: the foundation of godliness is truth. Much has been made of the economic images used in this elevation of truth. As Simpson has demonstrated, such images recur throughout B passus 1-7 not only to

undermine the autonomy of earthly economic practices by setting them in the context of their spiritual counterpart,⁸⁵

but also to

offer a typology of rewards from God by using economic images drawn from scholastic traditions: reward is either strictly deserved and paid in wages, or else it is a gift, conditional upon man's repentance for the sin into which he inevitably falls.⁸⁶

I would suggest that Holi Chirche's repeated injunction is intended purely in this figurative sense, as a guiding principle for Will's journey.⁸⁷ When he "tries" the allegorical figures which he is to encounter on his journey, it is truth which will provide the measure of spiritual value, and truth may be observed in the unity of words and works in accordance with the unimpeachable authority of Scripture. This dependence upon Scripture, it should be noted, is enacted in an unmediated form; it is the unadorned Word of God, *Deus*

⁸⁴ *PPL*, B I l.85-91.

⁸⁵ James Simpson, "Spirituality and Economics in Passus 1-7 of the B-Text," *YLS* 1 (1987): 101.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.101-102. Simpson suggests further that "the logic of Langland's economic images of reward from God pushes him into imagining a set of non-traditional labor relations on earth" (*ibid.*, p.102). I would argue, however, that rather than espousing the merits of the contemporary, post-feudal system of paid service [on which, see K.B. Mc Farlane, "Bastard Feudalism," in *England in the Fifteenth Century: Collected Essays* (London, 1981), pp.23-43], Langland was merely employing this model of socio-economic relations in order effectively to address a clergy corrupted by material wealth.

⁸⁷ The truth/treasure metaphor is repeated in ll.135-137 and at the close of the passus in l.207.

caritas,⁸⁸ spoken here by Holi Chirche in the ecclesiologically authoritative language of Latin.

Rather than providing an all-encompassing scheme of instruction for both cleric and layman alike, Holi Chirche, in the following lines, makes her didactic purpose more specific:

The clerkes that knowen this sholde kennen it aboute,
For Cristen and uncristen cleymeth it echone,⁸⁹

a point which is reinforced scarcely forty lines later:

Lereth it thus lewed men, for lettred it knoweth -
That Treuthe is tresor the trieste on erthe.⁹⁰

Aside from the issue of possible autobiographical illumination,⁹¹ it should not be forgotten that Langland chooses to represent his narrator as a minor cleric, and it is, therefore, to a cleric that Holi Chirche addresses these words.⁹² Although she has very clear opinions on “kynges and knyghtes” and “lewed men” in general,⁹³ it is the responsibility of the clergy to disseminate doctrinal precepts which is her foremost concern, and I would argue that this remains the foremost concern throughout the work. In common with the pastoral literature which was so influential upon Langland, *Piers Plowman* has much to say on all estates of society,⁹⁴ but the most over-riding concern is with the Church and the clergy. To return

⁸⁸ “God is Love:” 1 John 4.8.

⁸⁹ *PPL*, B I ll.92-93.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, B I ll.136-137. Reason, as noted above, speaks directly to both “the lered and the lewed” (B IV l.12). The implication here, once more, is that it is up to the “lered” clergy to act as mediators between Holi Chirche and the “lewed” laity.

⁹¹ One cannot, of course, draw biographical inferences from *Piers Plowman* without heeding Kane’s cautionary words; “some of them seem wise, perceptive, full of insight; they may be full of truth; but all are purely speculative; all are... unverifiable:” George Kane, *The Autobiographical Fallacy in Chaucer and Langland Studies* (London, 1965), p.9.

⁹² The addition of the “autobiographical” passages in *Piers Plowman*, C V ll.35-52 serves to give greater emphasis to Will’s clerical status. The possible reasons for such interpolations will be considered in chapter Six.

⁹³ *PPL*, B I ll.94 & 136.

⁹⁴ In her influential study of estates literature, Mohl pointed out that, in spite of its inclusion of motifs from estates satire, *Piers Plowman* is not “literature of estates in the strict sense of the term:” Ruth Mohl, *The Three*

briefly to our comparison with Reason in the *Roman de la Rose*; whereas Reason seeks to promote the moral self-government of the narrator and, by implication, the reader, Holi Chirche requires more. She demands that this should be put to active use, through words and works, to “kennen it aboute” to “lewed men.”

The sweeping anticlericalism of passus XV has been noted above, and this finds its most extreme expression in the reference to the *Donation of Constantine* in lines 555-559.⁹⁵ In alluding to the *Donation of Constantine*, Langland may appear to make what Hudson has termed his most “outspoken call:”⁹⁶ the call for clerical disendowment:

A medicyne moot therto that may amende prelates,
That sholden preie for the pees; possession hem letteth.
Taketh hire landes, ye lordes, and leteth hem lyve by dymes;
If possession be poison, and inparfite hem make,
Good were to deschargen hem for Holy Chirches sake,
And purgen hem of poison, er moore peril falle.⁹⁷

Whilst a widely-voiced Lollard solution to the ills brought about by clerical wealth and power,⁹⁸ Gradon has noted that confiscation of temporalities had not only been suggested much earlier, but had also found practical, if limited, expression in the case of Edward III and the Bishops of Norwich and Ely.⁹⁹ That Langland may be simply suggesting the most extreme, whilst at the same time orthodox, measures against clerical failings must, therefore, be allowed. Furthermore, if one reads the passage thus:

Estates in Medieval and Renaissance Literature (New York, 1962), p.103.

⁹⁵ On the *Donation of Constantine*, see Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, pp.91-93.

⁹⁶ Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, p.406.

⁹⁷ *PPL.*, B XV ll.560-565.

⁹⁸ See Leff, *Heresy in the Middle Ages* vol.2, pp.542-543; Margaret Aston, “‘Caim’s Castles’: Poverty, Politics and Disendowment,” in *Church, Politics and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. R.B. Dobson (Gloucester, 1984), pp.50-57.

⁹⁹ Gradon, “Langland and the Ideology of Dissent,” pp.186-188. See also Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, pp.337-341.

Taketh hire landes, ye lordes, and leteth hem lyve by dymes
If possession be poison and inparfite hem make.¹⁰⁰

the conditional at the start of line 563 thereby takes on greater emphasis, in consequence of which Anima's utterance appears more as a warning to the clergy than a call for action to the temporal authorities.

The invocation of the *Donation of Constantine*, in fact, provides an important structural pivot within the passus, upon which Langland's discussion turns. Indeed, it is followed by one of the most emphatic endorsements of the role of the clergy to be found in the poem:

Ac we Cristene creatures, that on the cros bileven,
Arn ferme as in the feith - Goddes forbode ellis! -
And han clerkes to kepen us therinne, and hem that shul come after us.¹⁰¹

In spite of the fallen nature of the contemporary Church, the vital role of the clergy in establishing and buttressing the faith of the laity remains, and will continue to remain, essential.

Writing of late medieval reformist attitudes to the Church, Leff has commented that the institution

was not simply a concept - *ecclesia* - but an historical entity which had undergone different phases of development: its present phase was one of decline as a result of certain historical events - above all the *Donation of Constantine*, which had introduced wealth and engendered a lust for possessions, legal rights, and absolute power (*plenitudo potestatis*).¹⁰²

Although concluding his prolonged criticism of the clergy by making reference to this polemical commonplace, Langland's subsequent discussion of the positive power of the clergy confounds the reader's expectation, and once more confirms a belief in the continued presence of the ideal in parallel with the corrupt. Through the dissemination of the teaching

¹⁰⁰ *PPL*, B XV ll.562-563.

¹⁰¹ *PPL*, B XV ll.577-579.

¹⁰² Leff, "Apostolic Ideal," p.72.

embodied in the Creed,¹⁰³ the clergy still have the ability to lead the heathen to salvation. It should be noted that Langland uses the term “heathen” in an exceptionally broad manner, encompassing not only “paynymes,”¹⁰⁴ but also the children of Christian parents prior to baptism, for “‘Hethen’ is to mene after heeth and untiled erthe.”¹⁰⁵ With reference to the ploughing motif which recurs frequently throughout the poem, it is clear that the work of the clergy is to plough this untiled earth wherever it may be found.¹⁰⁶ This is the main thrust of Langland's didacticism, for

... men knowe clerkes that han corsed the tyme
 That evere thei kouthe or knewe moore than *Credo in Deum patrem*
 And principally hir paternoster - many a persone hath wisshed.
 I se ensamples myself and so may many othere,
 That servaunts that serven lordes selde fallen in arerage
 But tho that kepen the lordes catel - clerkes and reves.
 Right so lewed men and of litel knowyng,
 Selden falle thei so foule and so fer in synne
 As clerkes of Holy Kirke that kepen Cristes tresor -
 The which is mannes soule to save, as God seith in the Gospel:
 “*Ite vos in vineam meam.*”¹⁰⁷

In the dispensation of their pastoral functions, the clergy may indeed lead the “heathen” to salvation, but the adoption of this instructional and authoritative role is, as has been noted above in considering XV ll.387-388, fraught with spiritual responsibilities and dangers beyond those faced by the laity. Thus, the quotation from Matthew 20.4, which closes passus X, “go you into my vineyard,” is an emphatic exhortation to clerical diligence.

It is for this reason that the poem may not draw to a close with the assertion of priestly duties in passus XV, but must continue on its corrective course. As is appropriate,

¹⁰³ *PPL*, B XV ll.606ff.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, B XV l.502.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, B XV l.457. In this, Langland appears to be using the word essentially in its sense of general “foreign-ness,” as may be found in *Sir Orfeo*, most versions of which contain some variation upon the line, “Icham an harpou of hepenisse.” See *Sir Orfeo*, pp.44-45.

¹⁰⁶ The use of ploughing as a metaphor for preaching is discussed at length in Barney, “The Plowshare of the Tongue,” pp.261-293. See chapter Two above.

¹⁰⁷ *PPL*, B X ll.463-472a.

this affirmation of clerical teaching is followed by an episode in which the dreamer himself is taught, and it is significant that Piers the ploughman should be invoked at this juncture.

Upon expressing the desire to find Charite, Will has been informed that

Withouten help of Piers Plowman...his persone sestow nevere.

Clerkes have no knowynge...but by werkes and by wordes.

Ac Piers the Plowman parceyveth moore depper

What is the wille, and wherfore that many wigh suffreth:

Et vidit Deus cogitaciones eorum,¹⁰⁸

The understanding of the clergy is shown to be inevitably limited without the deeper perception which may only be gained through that which is represented by Piers the ploughman, and the mere mention of Piers is enough to provoke the vision in passus XVI in which he instructs the narrator in the trinitarian nature of Christian charity. In the previous chapter, the ploughman's figurative nature as the ideal Christian was discussed, and this role underlies the necessity of his re-union with Will at this point.¹⁰⁹ Will has now been shown the effectiveness of the “werkes and wordes” of the clergy, but he still needs to be instructed in charity, the deeper ideal which should be the motivating force of Christian activity.

“Piers the Plowman!” quod I tho, and al for pure joye
That I herde nempne his name anoon I swowned after,
And lay longe in a lone dreem...

“Piers,” quod I, “I preie thee - whi stonde thise piles here?”¹¹⁰

Schmidt has noted that Will's satisfaction with the knowledge received from Piers is in marked contrast to his dissatisfaction with his earlier instructors.¹¹¹ Whilst this observation is largely correct, it ignores his first instructor, Holi Chirche. In fact, the pattern of Will's response to Piers, in which recognition leads immediately to deferential trust, in many ways

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, B XV ll.196, 198-200a.

¹⁰⁹ On the broader canvas, of course, this also pre-figures the assertion of the need for a re-union with Piers which is expressed at the close of the poem.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, B XVI ll.18-20, 24.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, n.53 p.347.

offers a parallel to his meeting with Holi Chirche, discussed above.¹¹²

If we return to this episode once more, it will be recalled that the narrator's expressed intent upon meeting Holi Chirche is to discover the means of his salvation, and he is informed that truth is the key. This lesson being imparted, his mentor prepares to take her leave:

“Now have I told thee what truthe is - that no tresor is bettre -
I may no lenger lenge thee with; now loke thee Oure Lord!”¹¹³

This exit is forestalled, however, as Will wishes to have his lesson clarified further:

Yet I courbed on my knees and cried hire of grace,
And seide, “Mercy, madame, for Marie love of hevene,
That bar that blisful barn that boughte us on the Rode -
Kenne me by som craft to knowe the false.”¹¹⁴

Holi Chirche duly directs his attention to the workings of Mede, whom she presents as an equal and opposite force to herself within the Church for, “in the Popes paleis she is pryvee as myselve.”¹¹⁵ Yet his initiation into the nature of the “false” may be seen to continue beyond the specific episode of Lady Mede herself, and into succeeding passus, reaching a culmination of sorts in the invocation of the *Donation of Constantine*; an acquisition of temporal dominion which may be seen as the acceptance of Mede into the Church. As Conscience says, Mede “blesseth thise bisshopes, theigh thei be lewed,”¹¹⁶ thereby substituting the values of material acquistiveness for those of clerical competence. From a

¹¹² It should be noted that the most significant difference between the narrator's encounters with Holi Chirche and Piers (in passus XVI) is that the element of fear in the former (*PPl.*, B I l.10) is absent from the latter. This may be taken as a further indication that Piers embodies the pure ideal of the Church: a suggestion which is taken up in the later *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* (discussed in chapter Four below), in which the narrator's fear of punishment by the institutionalised Church for not knowing the Apostles' Creed gives way before the unconditional benignity of his eventual teacher, Piers.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, B I ll.208-209.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, B II ll.1-4.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, B II l.23.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, B III l.149. In so doing, an important facet of Lady Mede's character is shown to be her representation of the corrupt *ecclesia carnalis*.

moral point of view, therefore, Will certainly experiences the “wondres” which he initially hoped to find.¹¹⁷

Once he has learned to “knowe the false,” it is then time to learn the true. It would perhaps be expected that Holi Chirche would once more provide instruction, but the critical discussion of the clergy which has taken place has effectively limited the moral authority of Holy Church in its broadest sense. For this reason, it is essential that Langland stresses that it is specifically the ideal aspect of the Church which advises Will. That this aspect is embodied in Piers is made clear in this episode by the aforementioned parallels with Holi Chirche, and has already been signposted in Passus XV:

Therefore by colour ne by clergie knowe shaltow hym nevere,
Neither thorough wordes ne werkes, but thorough wil oone,
And that knoweth no clerk ne creature on erthe
But Piers the Plowman - *Petrus, id est, Christus*.¹¹⁸

This reference to I Corinthians 10.4 not only suggests the apostle Simon Peter,¹¹⁹ but also explicitly associates Piers the ploughman with the apostle in his role as the foundation of the Church: he is the solid rock of true Christianity upon which stands the alarmingly shaky structure of the contemporary Church, which may be reached only through the action of the “will.”

Huppé has referred to the word-play which forges this link between will (or, indeed, “Will”), Piers, and the knowledge of God to which Piers is the guide as the “unifying principle” at the heart of the poem.¹²⁰ This link strengthens the identification of Piers as the

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, B Prologue l.4. For this negative aspect of “wondres,” see *Richard the Redeless* l.52: “be war of wyllfulness lest wondris arise.” In this instance, the term “wondris” appears to denote events which are not in accordance with natural or reasonable order. *Richard the Redeless*, in Helen Barr (ed.), *The Piers Plowman Tradition* (London, 1993), pp.99-133.

¹¹⁸ *PPL.*, B XV ll.209-212.

¹¹⁹ “And I say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Matthew 16.18.

¹²⁰ Bernard F. Huppé, “*Petrus id est Christus*: Word Play in *Piers Plowman*, the B-Text,” *ELH* 17 (1950): 190.

ideal Christian, but we must turn to another of Langland's complex verbal associations in order to understand the view espoused within the poem of the fourteenth-century Church as Langland saw it. Huppé, in the same article, draws attention to a movement within the text which is at the heart of Langland's discussion of the institution:

The image of the castle of Truth (with its opposite the dungeon of Hell) is developed by Holy Church in Passus I to include the image of the besieged Castle of the flesh (Caro); the basic image is developed by Piers Plowman in Passus V; by Wit in Passus IX; it is referred to by Clergy, XIIIff.; the image is transformed in the last Passus to the figure of the Barn of Christendom.¹²¹

The cumulative effect of these allegorical structures is indeed a strong unifying motif within the work. More than this, however, the development of "the symbolic value of the verbal ambiguities" reflects upon the nature of the relationship between Holi Chirche and Piers in Langland's consideration of the Church as a whole.¹²²

Skeat long ago suggested that Langland's description of Truth's abode in *Piers Plowman* B V may owe a debt to Robert Grosseteste's *Chateau D'Amour*, a work which circulated widely, both in its original form and in English translation.¹²³ Like *Piers Plowman*, the *Chateau D'Amour* is a didactic work concerned with salvation, and although it is much less complex than Langland's work, a certain amount of allegorical personification is employed. For example, the Lord has four daughters:

Pe furste douȝter hette Merci -
Pe kynges eldeste douȝter heo is;
Bat oþer hette Soþ iwis;
Pe þridde soster is cleped Riȝt;
Pees hette þe feorþe apliȝt.¹²⁴

These personifications remain clearly defined and readily understandable throughout the

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.179.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.179.

¹²³ Kari Sajavaara (ed.), *The Middle English Translations of Robert Grosseteste's Chateau D'Amour* (Helsinki, 1967), pp.36-39, 101-102.

¹²⁴ Robert Grosseteste, *Chateau D'Amour*, ll.300-304. All references are taken from the text in Sajavaara, *Middle English Translations*, pp.260-319.

work, yet one allegorical figure is less precise, and that is the Castle of Love itself. Belonging to a rich tradition of architectural allegory, encompassing both religious and secular interpretations,¹²⁵ the Castle is thus introduced:

Pis is þe castel of loue and lisse,
Of solace, of socour, of ioie and blisse,
Of hope, of hele, of sikernesse,
And ful of alle swetnesse.
Pis is þe Maydenes bodi so freo.¹²⁶

This initial definition of the Castle appears straightforward enough; it is the body of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the only perfect dwelling into which Christ, as God in man, may descend to earth, for

God nolde alihte in none manere
But in feir stude and in clere.¹²⁷

However, as the work progresses, the narrator pleads to the Virgin for his soul's admittance into the castle, in order to escape from his three foes, the World, the Flesh and the Devil. The castle/virgin symbolism has undergone a slight shift, as the castle now suggests the body of the Church, whilst the Virgin is the Lady of the Castle. A further transformation occurs as the poet declares that

Of þis castel ichabbe a luitel told,
Ac more me miȝte a þousand fold,
For alle þe godschupes þat in þe world is
Out of þis castel icomen is.¹²⁸

In this assertion that all the “godschupes” in the world derive from this castle, one may detect the presence of both the Virgin and the Church, whilst the notion of a fount of all

¹²⁵ On the scriptural origins of architectural allegory, see Jill Mann, “Allegorical Buildings in Medieval Literature,” *MAE* 63 (1994): 191-198. An overview of more secular applications may be found in Roger Sherman Loomis, “The Allegorical Siege in the Art of the Middle Ages,” *AJA* second series 23 (1919): 255-269. Unfortunately, I have been unable to consult the oft-cited Roberta D. Cornelius, “The Figurative Castle” (unpublished thesis, Bryn Mawr, 1930).

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, ll.757-761.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, ll.663-664.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, ll.913-916.

goodness surely implies a reference to God Himself. The figure of the Castle remains central throughout these transformations, but it accumulates a cluster of interpretative implications which imbue it with a significance beyond that which may be precisely defined. Nevertheless, as Mann has noted, there is a continued emphasis upon:

stability, closure, the solidification of perishable and unstable humanity into the petrified immobility of perfection.¹²⁹

For all the shifting implications of the image, the castle itself stands firm and secure throughout as a *locus* of unassailable perfection.

Whilst it is impossible to make secure attributions of Grosseteste's direct influence upon Langland,¹³⁰ similar strategies are certainly employed by the latter, and it is important to note that contemporary readers would be accustomed to such rather nebulous architectural allegory and would, therefore, be equipped to respond to such images. Characteristically, Langland's use of the allegorical castle is extremely eclectic and, in consequence, much more enigmatic than Grosseteste's Castle of Love. It may be useful at this point to return to Huppé's list and look at the transformations of the castle in more detail.

The "tour on a toft trieliche ymaked" is the first physical feature of the dream landscape to be mentioned specifically,¹³¹ thereby clearly defining its position of prime importance to the development of the poem. This status is confirmed when Will asks for an explanation of his vision, to which Holi Chirche replies:

"The tour upon the toft," quod she, "Truthe is therinne,
And wolde that ye wroughte as his word techeth.
For he is fader of feith and formed yow alle
Bothe with fel and with face and yaf yow fyve wittes

¹²⁹ Mann, "Allegorical Buildings," p.198.

¹³⁰ Sajavaara, *Middle English Translations*, pp.98-100.

¹³¹ *PPL*, B Prologue l.14.

For to worshiþe hym therwith while that ye ben here.¹³²

The tower is central to the vision, as it is the dwelling place of Truthe, who is here explicitly identified with God. But what of the tower itself? Due to its elevated position, one may perhaps consider it to be heaven, but in view of its unequivocally earthly location, it is apparently more in the nature of the dwelling place of God upon earth. A familiarity with the *Chateau D'Amour* would suggest the body of the Virgin, but perhaps the body of Christ, or even the perfect institution of the Church itself would be a more likely interpretation. Certainly, the figure of Holi Chirche would be an appropriate spokesperson for either of these latter suggestions.

In B Passus V, Piers has appropriated the role of the guide from Holi Chirche, and gives elaborate directions to the court of St. Truthe.¹³³ The ambiguity surrounding the precise nature of Truthe's dwelling, however, is increased, as Piers concludes his directions with the statement that:

And if Grace graunte thee to go in in this wise
Thow shalt see in thiselue Truthe sitte in thyn herte.¹³⁴

The external and inner manifestations of God are unified by a "cheyne of charite."¹³⁵ This inner castle is said by Wit to be the home of Dowel and his beloved Anima,¹³⁶ thereby removing the specific emphasis from the divine presence itself, and onto the operation of God (Dowel) through man's soul (Anima). The attempt to comprehend this notion is touched upon by Clergie in B Passus XIII, as he describes the seven arts dwelling in God's

¹³² *Ibid.*, I ll.12-16.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, B ll.537ff.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, B V ll.605-606. This echoes Holi Chirche's statement in I l.164 that in the heart is "the heed and the heighe welle" of love.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, V l.607.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, B IX ll.1-24.

castle. Nevertheless, he is forced to confess to his inadequacy:

For oon Piers the Plowman hath impugned us alle,
And set alle sciences at a sop save love one.¹³⁷

Throughout these recurrences of the castle motif, therefore, it may be seen that the emphasis upon the human element is increased. Furthermore, following the initial definition by Holi Chirche, Piers becomes an essential element for the comprehension of the nature of the castle. As Huppé noted, however, the image undergoes one more transformation before the close of the poem, when the castle of Truthe becomes the barn of “Unite - Holy Chirche on Englissh.”¹³⁸ The structure changes from a castle to a barn, and is no longer explained, but “ordeigne(d)” by Piers.¹³⁹ Yet, in spite of the transformation of the nature of the structure, it is still described throughout the closing two passus in terms suggestive of a castle: a building under siege from without.

As the poem draws to a close, a circle becomes complete, as Holi Chirche is once more introduced. However, whereas in Passus I she had been allegorised as the personified representative of the tower of Truthe, authoritatively instructing Will, she has now become an inanimate structure, the lordship over which is contested by Piers and the Antichrist. As discussed previously, Piers represents the ideal of diligent Christian labour,¹⁴⁰ and it is therefore his duty to oppose Antichrist's forces which, pointedly, are swelled by ranks of corrupt clergy, rather than mere abstract sins which alone had attacked the body earlier,

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, B XIII ll.123-124. It would appear that, in this context, Langland is using the term “Clergie” in a characteristically multi-faceted manner, implying both “learning” and “the learned,” as well as “the clergy” in the modern sense of the term.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, B XIX l.330.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, B XIX l.320.

¹⁴⁰ See above, p.45.

both in Langland's work and in the *Chateau D'Amour*.¹⁴¹ The contest is for the human element within the Church; Holi Chirche her/itself is an incorruptible ideal, but throughout the work the separation of contemporary practice from this ideal has been gradually enacted.¹⁴²

Throughout the turbulent period between the 1360s and the 1380s, the concerns about the Church which prompted Langland's writing remained pressing, and no clear resolution presented itself. Langland's uncompromising response to this continued state of crisis is perfectly reflected in the chaotic and enigmatic final two passus of his work in which, in accordance with the warning given in the prologue, "the mooste meschief on molde is mountynge up faste."¹⁴³ Following the idealistic establishment of the barn of Unity comes the attack of the Antichrist who, through the guile of the friars in particular, overcomes the defenders. Yet the work does not end in defeat and despair, but instead shows Conscience preparing to remedy the situation by setting out to "haue Piers the Plowman."¹⁴⁴ The verb "haue" implies something more profound than would be conveyed by, for example, "find" - it implies the acquisition of the attributes, embodied in Piers, which are necessary for the restoration of Unity and the consequent repristination of Holi Chirche.

In order bring this reformation into being, the clergy require a certain level of learning

¹⁴¹ *PPl.*, B XX ll.58-60. It is worthy of note that in B XIX ll.431-451, Piers is explicitly contrasted with the corrupt Pope.

¹⁴² Jennings takes the notion of Piers as an aspect of Holy Church a step further and suggests that Holi Chirche represents the theoretical teaching of the Church, whilst Piers "deals with the moral steps leading the soul to union with truth:" Margaret Jennings, "Piers Plowman and Holychurch," *Viator* 9 (1978): 369-370. Whilst similar in essence to my own view, I feel that the close equivalence between Holi Chirche and Piers suggested by Jennings rather excludes the fallen element of the *ecclesia carnalis* from the broadly-defined Church; a view which is contradicted by the contest over the edifice of Unity in the closing passus.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, B Prologue, l.67.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, B XX l.386. Indeed, the course of action which Conscience proposes to embark upon beyond the limitations of the written text may be interpreted as signifying the ultimate act of shaking off any residual sloth, and thereby finally vanquishing his companion, despair. On the relationship between sloth and despair, see above, pp.39-40.

which they are, at present, failing to attain. The necessity of this learning is displayed in the episode of Truth's pardon in B Passus VII:¹⁴⁵ in the discussion of the pardon, Piers is defined as "lettred a litel,"¹⁴⁶ whilst the priest is condemned as a "lewed lorel."¹⁴⁷ To return to the point with which this chapter began, it may be seen that it is necessary for the clergy to "haue Piers the Plowman" in order to read, and authoritatively expound upon, God's law.

That Langland is highly critical of the contemporary state of the clergy is undeniable. Nevertheless, by reading his complex architectural allegory for the ideal Church in parallel with his anticlericalism, we may see that Langland did not, as Scase has emphatically claimed, "oppose all clerics,"¹⁴⁸ but merely sought their reform: he was, as he expresses it, "afered of folk of Holy Kirke."¹⁴⁹

The "danger" of Langland's anticlericalism was not that he found fault with all ranks of the clergy, but rather in the manner in which his reformism was presented. In employing the figure of Piers, derived as it is from established precedents in pastoral literature, Langland would appear, at least in the B-text, to have been oblivious to the implications for an expanding lay audience less familiar than his intended clerical audience with Piers' textual lineage.¹⁵⁰ By creating such a powerful synthesis of traditional elements in a vernacular work, at a time in which the English language was flourishing, Langland unwittingly loosed

¹⁴⁵ See above, p.64, n.45.

¹⁴⁶ *PPL.*, B VII l.132.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, B VII l.137.

¹⁴⁸ Scase, *Piers Plowman and the New Anticlericalism*, p.x.

¹⁴⁹ *PPL.*, B XV l.383.

¹⁵⁰ The place of the A-text in Langland's scheme of revision is problematic, and will be touched upon in the next chapter and in chapter Six.

hitherto regulated anticlerical discourse into an unregulated interpretative community. Piers the ploughman, in consequence, became a totem for religious and, to a certain extent, political discontent, and it is to this independent, unruly life beyond Langland's original conception that I shall now turn.

CHAPTER 4

LOLLARD INTERPRETATION AND APPROPRIATION OF *PIERS PLOWMAN*:

PIERCE THE PLOUGHMAN'S CREDE

In the preceding two chapters, we have seen how Langland, deeply concerned by the corruption which he saw in the Church around him, deployed the traditional allegorical figure of the ploughman to represent the ideal Christian in a complex work which called for a complete repristination of the *ecclesia carnalis*. Aware that the fallible clergy themselves composed the root from which the Christian community either flourished or failed, he addressed *Piers Plowman* to this estate, of which he himself was a member. Respecting learning, but believing strongly that spiritual virtue was of greater importance, Langland wrote primarily in the vernacular, that even clerics with little or no Latin might understand and thus benefit from his work. However, in so making his work accessible to the broadest range of the clergy, he also made it potentially available to the lay audience for vernacular works which was discussed in chapter One.

In the present chapter, I shall begin to investigate the way in which Langland's ploughman was held up as a figure of dissent - specifically religious dissent - once it had been assimilated and appropriated by this unintended audience. I should like to commence by addressing the points at which Langland positively encourages his readers to make their own interpretations of *Piers Plowman*:

What this metels bymeneth, ye men that ben murye,
Devyne ye - for I ne dar, by deere God in hevene!¹

With these words, the character Will curtails his fable of the rats, speaking directly to

¹ *PPL.*, B Prologue ll.209-210.

the reader before the action of *Piers Plowman* plunges into the confused hubbub of the city. This aside acts as a bridge between the allegorical animal fable and the vision of the human society to which it pertains. Whilst the transition is structurally unremarkable in itself, the linking lines present the reader with a number of questions. First, why is the moral, with which one would expect a fable to end, absent? Secondly, what are the implications of the lines themselves and, thirdly, who exactly is the speaker at this point?

The fable of the rats appears to be traditional, and was also used by Langland's contemporary, Bishop Brunton, in a sermon probably delivered on 18th May 1376.² However, whilst Brunton pointedly holds up the pusillanimous mice as an example to be avoided, in Langland's version it is left up to the reader to extract his own conclusions regarding the "commune profit:" the poet merely presents, albeit in a satirical fashion, the issues involved in a debate on the nature of good government. Yet, as is emphatically stated, it is not purely in order to allow the reader to make up his own mind on the subject that no conclusion is presented, but also because the poet *dares* not to make the moral explicit.

This notion of restrictions upon that which may or may not be expressed recurs throughout the poem, and is perhaps most strikingly articulated in speaking or, rather, not speaking, of the papal curia, of which Langland writes, "I kan and kan naught of court speke moore."³ The poet - and surely at moments such as this it is as much the voice of Langland as it is of Will - must stop short before openly pointing the finger of accusation at those in authority, whether temporal or ecclesiastical. As Simpson has noted, Langland paradoxically uses these direct references to the necessity of constant self-censorship in order to authorise

² Thomas Brinton, *The Sermons of Thomas Brinton, Bishop of Rochester (1373-1389)* 2 vols., ed. Mary Aquinas Devlin (London, 1954), vol.2, pp.315-321. On Brunton's use of the fable, see Eleanor H. Kellogg, "Bishop Brunton and the Fable of the Rats," *PMLA* 50 (1935): 57-68.

³ *PPL.*, B Prologue l.111.

his own satire.⁴ Effective as this is, however, it also leaves the vital issue of “what this metels bymeneth” dangerously open to interpretation by a readership over which the poet has no control: indeed, it is Langland’s overall unwillingness to state clearly his purpose in writing which allowed his allegorical ploughman to be adopted so readily by antisacerdotal polemicists almost as soon as his poem had been written. The textual tradition of *Piers Plowman* bears witness to this relinquishing of control by Langland, and displays countless variant readings which reflect the views of “scribes too interested in their original to be content merely to transmit it.”⁵ An important element of this textual tradition is, of course, Langland’s own attempt to reassert control over his work through the process of revision; a process to which I shall turn in due course.⁶

Barron has drawn an attractive picture of Langland’s possible immediate audience:

Langland, we know, visited the homes of rich men and offered them spiritual counsel, doubtless reciting his poem...The poet knew well the weaknesses of the men whose hospitality he accepted, and he did not spare them. But he was not unremittingly critical of such men, and his portrait of their failings is devoid of the bitterness that characterises his attacks on the friars.⁷

Whilst it is, indeed, likely that Langland may well have made use of relevant sections of his work in such situations, it would appear somewhat doubtful that a poet who would write

Freres and fele othere maistres that to the lewed men prechen,
Ye moeven materes unmesurable to tellen of the Trinite,
That oftetyms the lewed peple of hir bileve doute,⁸

would consider much of *Piers Plowman* to be suitable fare for the laity. If, therefore, we accept Barron’s suggested audience of “rich men,” we must keep in mind that this audience

⁴ James Simpson, “The Constraints of Satire in *Piers Plowman* and *Mum and the Sothsegger*,” in *Langland, the Mystics and the Medieval English Religious Tradition*, ed. Helen Phillips (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 11-30.

⁵ J.A. Burrow, *Medieval Writers and their Work* (Oxford, 1982), pp.30-31. Kane, too, has noted a “lively, but not necessarily intelligent participation by many scribes in the poem that they were copying:” introduction to William Langland, *Piers Plowman: The A Version*, ed. George Kane (London, 1960), p.136.

⁶ See chapter Six below.

⁷ Barron, “William Langland: A London Poet,” p.97.

⁸ *PPL.*, B XV ll.70-72.

would undoubtedly be given only judiciously selected elements of the poem.

Recently, Mann has suggested that the A version of *Piers Plowman*, contrary to the generally accepted view,⁹ represents not an embryonic version of the work, but an incomplete final revision for a lay audience, characterised by

1) simple shortening by omission of lines or passages...; 2) omission of Latin quotations; 3) bowdlerization - that is, omission of sexual material; 4) omission of material which might seem to encourage criticism of the clergy or the upper ranks of society, especially the king; 5) omission of metaphor.¹⁰

In short, Mann sees the A-text as “stressing the practical duties of Christian living, reducing the text’s metaphoric complexities, and toning down its social criticisms.”¹¹ I shall return to the matter of Langland’s revisions in chapter Six. At this point, however, it is worthy of note that the notion of a version being prepared with the controversial elements carefully excised, whether early or late in the life of the poem, accords well with the idea of appropriate selections being employed by Langland in the course of his clerical duties.

An argument in favour of supposing that longer versions of *Piers Plowman* were also intended for a lay audience may perhaps be suggested by Langland’s occasional use of secular forms of address aimed directly at his audience. Following the friar’s parodic absolution of Lady Mede for the price of a window, for example, there is an unequivocally authorial interjection condemning such practices,¹² which culminates in the solemn warning:

Forthi I lere yow lordes, leveth swiche writynges -
To writen in wyndowes of youre wel dedes
Or to greden after Goddes men whan ye gyve doles,
On aventure ye have youre hire here and youre hevene als.¹³

⁹ See, for example, Godden, *Making of Piers Plowman*, pp.171-201.

¹⁰ Jill Mann, “The Power of the Alphabet: A Reassessment of the Relation between the A and the B Versions of *Piers Plowman*,” *YLS* 8 (1994): 27-28.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.46.

¹² *PPl.*, B III ll.64ff.

¹³ *Ibid.*, B III ll.69-72.

This address, taken in isolation, would suggest an audience of lay “lordes,” but within the poem it follows closely upon Mede’s promise to the clerks:

To loven hem lelly and lordes to make
And in the consistorie at the court do callen hire names.¹⁴

Under the auspices of Mede, the embodiment of the corrupt earthly Church,¹⁵ the cleric gains temporal status, but concomitantly abandons his spiritual status. That her confessor is “coped *as a frere*” further emphasises this ambiguity of status when the ideal is corrupted by worldly Mede.¹⁶ Rather than an address to a lay reader, therefore, this may be read as one of Langland’s many attacks upon clerics who place temporal lordship above their spiritual duty, and merely feign piety.¹⁷

As I have suggested, although Langland’s concerns are with society as a whole, he considers the moral health of that society to be wholly dependent upon its heart, the Church. I would argue that it is for this reason that his criticisms of the laity are less harsh: the full weight of his satirical invective is directed towards the essential task of reforming his own kind, the clergy. That the anticlericalism of *Piers Plowman* is most strongly antifraternial is possibly an indication of Langland’s taking sides in the secular/mendicant conflict, although it should be noted, of course, that no member of any rank of the clergy escapes completely.¹⁸

The fourteenth-century Dominican, Thomas Waleys, in his manual *De modo componendi sermones*, declared that

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, B III ll.30-31.

¹⁵ See chapter Three.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, B III l.35. My italics.

¹⁷ I would suggest that “greden after Goddes men” should be read as “call out *in the same manner as* God’s men,” suggesting false self-promotion, rather than “call out to God’s men.” *The Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. “after” 6, cites this meaning from the late fourteenth century (the earliest cited instance occurs in *Gawain and the Green Knight*), but I would argue that this passage in Langland presents a convincing case for an earlier dating of this usage.

¹⁸ The strictness of the monastic orders is, however, commended when Wrath complains of the harsh treatment he receives from monks: *PPL.*, B V ll.167-175.

Necessarium tamen est ut discretionem habeat in loquendo, secundum diversitatem auditorum. Si enim soli clero praedicet, licitum est et expediens quod contra eos vel eorum vitia et quae sunt clericis propria... Similiter ubi solum est populus, non invehatur contra clerum aut vitia quae solum clericis consueverunt in esse.¹⁹

[It is necessary to have discretion in speaking, according to the diversity of listeners. If one preaches to the clergy alone, it is permissible and expedient that he should censure them or their vices, together with those vices which are particular to the clergy... Likewise, where there is only laity, he should not inveigh against the clergy, nor the vices generally belonging to the clergy alone.]

This practice was not formally enshrined until the 1409 *Constitutions* of Archbishop Arundel,²⁰ but it would seem that Langland, and contemporary owners of his work, would generally have applied this dictum if making selective use of the poem. The earliest known mis-appropriation of *Piers Plowman*, for example, by John Ball, “som tyme Seynte Marie prest of York, and now of Colchestre,”²¹ contains no anticlerical implications, even though the hated Sudbury, as both Archbishop of Canterbury and Chancellor, could easily have been made a target for accusations of devotion to Lady Mede. It may be inferred that, even if Ball had no personal reservations about employing anticlerical aspects of *Piers Plowman* when addressing a lay audience, he did not assume the necessary familiarity in that audience for these aspects of the work.

An observation made by Spencer may help to locate Langland’s intended readers more precisely:

With the growing prestige of English as a written medium in the later fourteenth century, there appears to have been a tendency for the class of priests with parish duties (for the most part secular clergy) to demand sermons written in English, whereas the higher clergy and the regulars - monks and friars - tended to continue to write sermons in Latin.²²

This preference for the vernacular may perhaps be taken as another piece of circumstantial

¹⁹ Thomas Waleys, “De modo componendi sermones cum documentis,” in *Artes praedicandi*, ed Th.-M. Charland (Paris, 1936), pp.337-338.

²⁰ For Arundel's *Constitutions* see *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae* 4 vols., ed. David Wilkins (reprint, London, 1964), vol.3, pp.314-319.

²¹ The text of Ball's letter is reproduced in Dobson, *The Peasants' Revolt*, p.381.

²² Spencer, *English Preaching*, p.57.

evidence, placing the intended audience for *Piers Plowman* amongst the secular clergy, but it also made the work potentially accessible to the growing lay audience for vernacular works which was discussed in chapter One.

Although, as has been noted above, it was considered inappropriate for the clergy to preach directly against their own in front of the laity, the other way of looking at Waleys' advice and Arundel's *Constitutions* is to surmise from their apparent necessity that at least some clerics may have indulged in a certain amount of public self-criticism of this kind. Owst, in seeking to prove the indebtedness of vernacular anticlerical satire to sermons, cites several examples of sermons which censure clerical corruption.²³ Although he assumes, rather than demonstrates, that such sermons were preached to a lay audience, it is reasonable to assume that instances of such tirades were increased by the ongoing secular/mendicant controversy. As Langland's Wrath declares,

And now persons han parceyved that freres parte with hem,
Thise possessioners preche and deprave freres;
And freres fyndeth hem in defaute, as folk bereth witnesse,
That whan thei preche the peple in many places aboute,
I, Wrathe, walke with hem and wisse hem of my bokes.²⁴

Although it cannot be proved, it is quite possible that Langland himself unwittingly provided eloquent material to be used in such backbiting, with exasperated parish priests perhaps gleaning illustrations with which to warn their parishioners against the dangers of the spiritually ineffectual and corrupting "Frere Flaterere."²⁵ It is by such a process that, as mentioned at the close of chapter two, *Piers Plowman* could have found its way into the arena of lay awareness, with actual lay ownership of manuscripts following later.

²³ Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, pp.243-286.

²⁴ *PPL*, B V ll.142-146.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, B XX l.324. Although the factual basis is debatable, the principle of one order of friars criticising the others forms the satirical backbone of much of *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*, a work considered in detail below.

In the mid-fourteenth century, the Dominican John Bromyard, in a legitimate spirit of reform, could write:

I am much afraid to speak very vehemently; nevertheless I dare not be silent, lest I incur the "Woe!" of Isaiah, who says (vi, 5) - "Woe is me, because I kept silence."²⁶

In this, Bromyard uses the highest authority, the Bible, for his criticism, echoing the words of Isaiah, whose prophetic voice was directly commanded by God. Langland, however, as we have seen, was well aware of constraints upon his own reformist satire, and engaged in an exploration of self-justification in a lengthy exchange between Leaute and Will in B passus XI:

"Wherefore lourestow?" quod Lewtee and loked on me harde.
"If I dorste amonges men," quod I, "this metels avowe!"
"Yis, by Peter and by Poul!" quod he, "and take hem bothe to witnesse:
Non oderis fratres secrete in corde tuo set publice argue illos."
"They wole aleggen also," quod I, "and by the Gospel preven:
Nolite iudicare quemquam."
"And wherof serveth lawe," quod Lewtee, "if no lif undertoke it -
Falsnesse ne faiterie? For somewhat the Apostle seide
Non oderis fratrem.
And in the Sauter also seith David the prophete
Existimasti inique quod ero tui similis &c.
It is *licitum* for lewed men to legge the sothe
If hem liketh and lest - ech a lawe it graunteth;
Except persons and preestes of Holy Chirche:
It falleth noght for that folk no tales to telle -
Though the tale were trewe - and it touched synne.
"Thyng that al the world woot, wherefore sholdestow spare
To reden it in retorik to arate dedly synne?
Ac be neveremoore the firste the defaute to blame;
Though thou se yvel, seye it noght first - be sory it nere amended.
No thyng that is pryve, publice thouw it nevere;
Neither for love laude it noght, ne lakke it for envye:
Parum lauda; vitupera parcius."²⁷

The *Middle English Dictionary* defines "leaute" as "uprightness, honorableness,

²⁶ Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, p.249. On the literary tradition of discussions concerning the relative merits and dangers of speaking the truth and remaining silent, see Andrew Wawn, "Truth-telling and the Tradition of *Mum and the Sothsegger*," *YES* 13 (1983):270-287.

²⁷ *PPL.*, B XI ll.85-106a.

honesty; truth; justice, fairness,”²⁸ so Langland’s figure of Leaute is, therefore, the perfect spokesperson on the legitimacy of overt criticism, as well as an ideal companion for Scripture, who is the ultimate arbiter of these qualities. It is interesting to observe how the justification of truth-telling develops throughout the above exchange. Leaute commences by citing Old Testament authority, which had been reiterated in the New Testament by “Peter and Poul.”²⁹ Will immediately refutes this affirmation of the right to judge, appropriately continuing the dispute by offering an opposing biblical text, before the argument is finally clinched by Leaute who, again invoking scriptural authority, declares that it is “*licitum*” openly to pass judgement where it is due.³⁰ It is noticeable, even in a work so heavily impregnated with Latin phrases, that such phrases are particularly dense in this passage, thereby adding a formal gravity to the debate, whereas the general drift and, most importantly, the conclusion of the argument, may readily be followed in the vernacular alone.³¹

Leaute's discussion, however, does not end here. The case for truth-telling, and the moral constraints thereon, is expounded upon further, purely in the vernacular, presumably in order to stress the point unequivocally to the “lewed” (that is unlearned in Latin) in Langland's audience. Although Schmidt considers the term “lewed” in this instance to refer specifically to “ordinary laymen,” I would argue that this position is clearly refuted by the

²⁸ *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. “Leaute” (a). Kean interprets Langland’s use of “lewte” as a combination of all these attributes, which he sums up as “living well” in accordance with absolute virtue: P.M. Kean, “Love, Law, and *Lewte* in Piers Plowman,” *RES* n.s. 15 (1964), pp.255-256.

²⁹ This invocation of Peter and Paul in support of legitimate spiritual authority not only draws upon the apostolic ideal of the early Church, but also makes a striking contrast to the “pardon with a peis of leed and two polles amyddes” with which Haukyn is fobbed off in *ibid.*, B XIII l.246. See above, p.61.

³⁰ Alford has noted that the word “*licitum*” has specifically legal implications. See John A. Alford, *Piers Plowman: A Glossary of Legal Diction* (Cambridge, 1988), p.88.

³¹ Indeed, by the frequent insertion of “quod I/he/Leautee,” Langland defines the speakers and their respective standpoints with a clarity and simplicity which is rare in the work as a whole.

pointed reference to “persons and preestes of Holy Chirche.”³² Once more, the particular responsibilities of the clergy are defined in the context of the more general statements, as it is made clear that they should remain silent on any matter that “touched synne” - the confidences of the confessional are to remain inviolate. This speech appeals to reason rather than scriptural authority, and closes with a citation of classical wisdom - “praise little, blame less” - attributed to Seneca. Throughout *Piers Plowman*, it is frequently difficult, and occasionally impossible, to decide if a view expressed may be considered as authorial opinion, but the fact that the issue here is one of profound concern to Langland as a poet, and that the ideas propounded by Leautee are immediately endorsed by the preaching of the unimpeachably authoritative figure of Scripture,³³ strongly suggests that we have here been given Langland’s own views concerning the denunciation of corruption.

The need for such questioning of the poet’s chosen role, coupled with the seriousness and linguistic formality with which the issue is discussed, is indicative of the importance of such concerns in the later fourteenth century.³⁴ Indeed, throughout the period in which Langland was writing and revising *Piers Plowman*, and well into the fifteenth century, self-justification of reformist polemic became more and more vital as Wyclif and, subsequently, the Lollards took their anticlerical reformism to dangerous extremes, as may be seen in a Lollard text which probably dates from the early years of the fifteenth century:³⁵

³² For Schmidt’s translation, see William Langland, *Piers Plowman*, trans. A.V.C. Schmidt (Oxford, 1992), p.114. It should be noted that it is an unlearned cleric (a “lewed vicory”) who exalts Piers above the corrupt clergy in *PPL.*, B XIX ll.412-449.

³³ Scripture may be seen as the highest form of authority, for it is the written form of scripture, Book, who is invoked by Langland as the first-hand witness to Christ Himself in *PPL.*, B XVIII ll.229ff. This insistence upon the primacy of scripture would no doubt have appealed to subsequent Lollard readers.

³⁴ The issue is perhaps most fully explored in the early fifteenth-century poem *Mum and the Sothsegger*, included in Barr, *Piers Plowman Tradition*, pp.137-202.

³⁵ Printed in F.D. Matthew (ed.), *The English Works of Wyclif, Hitherto Unprinted* (London, 1902), pp.55-107. Although Matthew concludes that at the time of composition it “looks as if the infliction of death for heresy was not yet allowed” (p.52), I would suggest that the writer’s claim that “anticristis worldly clerkis” “pursue & sclandre & enprisone & slee & brenne pore prestis þat techen holy writt & cristis gospel of pouert & mekenesse

And herefore þe holy prophete ysaie criep þat woo is to hym, for þat he was stille
and dwelte among synful peple, and telle hem not here synnes, siþ þis is offis of a
prophete.³⁶

This exhortation to the necessity of preaching the plain truth is familiar from Bromyard, but although its expressed purpose is the same reform of “prelatis (that) leuen prechyng of þe gospel & ben gostly manquelleris [slayers] of mennys soulis,”³⁷ its ultimate implications are altogether more dangerous. For, whereas Bromyard had preached for the improvement of his own order, the anonymous author of this Lollard text insists that

ʒif men vnder hem knowe þis defaute & may amenden it & don not, þei consenten
& meyntenen hem in þis grete synne.³⁸

In the previous chapter, it was noted that Langland considered the vice of an aberrant cleric to be more serious than that of a layman, as it affected not only himself, but also the spiritual well-being of his congregation. Whilst the Lollard author maintains this observation,³⁹ the above lines show an alteration of perspective which accords greater responsibility to the layman; if he does not try to amend the erring cleric, he is implicated in the latter's sin. The orthodox example of Isaiah is thereby appropriated in order to empower the “trewe men” in their contest with the ordained clergy over claims to divine authority.⁴⁰

aʒenst here worldly lif” (p.88) is a strong argument for a date after the institution in 1401 of the statute *De haeretico comburendo*.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.56.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.55. The reform element, however, is soon relegated to a minor role in what transpires to be a somewhat repetitive diatribe against the “pre & fourty errouris and heresies” of “euele prelatis:” *ibid.*, p.107.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.57.

³⁹ “Siþ cristen men may not lyue gostly but bi goddis word, prelatis þat wiþdrawen þus goddis word fro here sugetis ben cause of dep of her soulis, þat is a þousand folde worse þan is dep of body, & so þei be worse man-sleeris þan þei þat only sleen þe body:” *ibid.*, p.56.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.57. In an extensive study, Hudson has found “trewe men” to be the most common phrase by which Lollard writers distinguished themselves from the “false” clergy: Anne Hudson, “A Lollard Sect Vocabulary?,” in *Lollards and their Books*, ed. Anne Hudson (London, 1985), pp.166-167.

Furthermore, this authority, both scriptural and that of the doctors of the Church,⁴¹ is cited in the language of the “trewe men” - the English vernacular. Hudson has recently questioned the importance customarily accorded to the vernacular amongst the early Lollards. However, whilst she convincingly concludes that “at least for the first thirty or forty years of its existence, (the Lollard) heresy did not relinquish its academic aspirations,” it is only assumptions concerning the rapidity of the transition from Latin to the vernacular as the paramount language of Lollardy which are modified, rather than the overall trend itself.⁴²

It was central to Lollard thought that the Word of God should be readily available to all and, as a result of growing official hostility to the sect following the condemnation of Wyclif's teaching in 1382, the dissemination of the Word was, of necessity, carried out in secret in small conventicles. As Kendall has noted, this pragmatic move towards small private gatherings accorded rather conveniently with Lollard disdain for the sacredness of church buildings.⁴³ This enforced mode of transmission also caused great importance to be attached to the production and circulation of vernacular devotional texts, both for private and public reading.⁴⁴ Indeed, the scale of production of such heretical texts made it possible for one woman to assert that

she cold here a better sermond at home in hur howse than any doctor or prist colde

⁴¹ Both Grosseteste and Gregory are invoked as authorities throughout the work: *English Works of Wyclif*, p.56. Although scripture was considered by the Lollards to be the “ground” of all belief, simple ascription to other authorities was occasionally employed, “as if the preacher were merely agreeing with a respected colleague, rather than calling on an irrefutable authority.” Peggy Knapp, *Chaucer and the Social Contest* (London, 1990), p.73.

⁴² Anne Hudson, “*Laicus litteratus*: the Paradox of Lollardy,” in *Heresy and Literacy: 1000-1530*, ed. Peter Biller and Anne Hudson (Cambridge, 1994), p.236.

⁴³ Ritchie D. Kendall, *The Drama of Dissent: The Radical Poetics of Nonconformity, 1380-1590* (London, 1986), pp.22-23.

⁴⁴ See Anne Hudson, “Some Aspects of Lollard Book Production,” *SCH* 9 (1972): 147-157.

make at Poulis crosse or any other place.⁴⁵

The Lollard usurpation of clerical authority may be seen in such a case as providing a heterodox alternative to the corrupt clergy - an alternative which many laymen found more acceptable. The priest or friar could be replaced by any “trewe man” with access to the Word of God in a lateral, rather than hierarchical, teaching relationship.⁴⁶ What better symbol could there be for such a teacher than a true Christian layman, such as may be perceived in the figure of Piers the ploughman? Indeed, Piers was soon to be depicted elevating Wyclif himself to authoritative status in commenting upon the corruption of the contemporary Church:

Wytnesse on Wycliff that warned hem with trewth;
For he in goodnesse of gost graythliche hem warned
To wayuen her wikednesse and werkes of synne.
Whou sone this sori men seweden his soule,
And oueral lollede him with heretykes werkes.⁴⁷

With regard to the relationship between *Piers Plowman* and Lollardy, it has been said that “the issue is really that Lollards had Langlandian sympathies,”⁴⁸ and nowhere is this more apparent than in *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*. Written certainly after the trial of Walter Brut in October 1393, and probably before the institution of *De haeretico comburendo* in 1401,⁴⁹ this is the earliest surviving poem which openly acknowledges *Piers*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.157.

⁴⁶ For an example of the network by which Lollard teaching spread in the specific case of late fourteenth-century Northampton, see A.K. McHardy, “Bishop Buckingham and the Lollards of the Lincoln Diocese,” *SCH* 9 (1972): 138-139.

⁴⁷ *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*, in *Piers Plowman Tradition*, ll.528-532.

⁴⁸ Lawton, “Lollardy and the *Piers Plowman* Tradition,” p.793.

⁴⁹ The trial of Brut is specifically mentioned in *Crede*, ll.657 ff. Barr argues convincingly that in view of the outspoken comments in the poem concerning the prosecution of Lollards, the absence of any reference to the burning of William Sawtre in 1401 suggests that the work pre-dates this event: Barr, *Piers Plowman Tradition*, p.10. This slightly modifies the view put forward by Lawton, which dated composition of *Crede* to the period 1394-c.1402: Lawton, “Lollardy and the *Piers Plowman* Tradition,” p.787.

Plowman as an antecedent, modelling itself upon Langland's "Dowel" section,⁵⁰ as well as adopting the central figure of Piers himself. However, whereas Langland may be seen as taking pains throughout successive textual revisions to avoid possible accusations of heterodoxy,⁵¹ the poet of the *Crede*, as is demonstrated in the above quote, positively asserts an uncompromising support of Wyclif, who is presented as a spokesman for truth. This is significant in that the truth itself, and the process by which one may attain truth is, as in *Piers Plowman*, a central concern within the poem as a whole.

The premise upon which the poem is based is that the narrator does not know the Apostles' Creed, the basic statement of the Christian faith, and is concerned that

Whan y schal schewen myn schrift schent mote y worthen,
The prest wil me punyche and penaunce enioyne,⁵²

as all Christians were required to know the Paternoster, Ave Maria and Creed.⁵³ However, whilst the poet is outwardly self-critical about his devotional failings, the reader may detect an implied condemnation of the priest who, rather than looming as a threatening and punitive presence, should surely be aiding such an assiduous student as the poem's narrator.⁵⁴ Indeed, given the clearly stated literacy of the narrator,⁵⁵ one would assume that this would be an easy task for a competent parish priest. In this there is perhaps the

⁵⁰ This has been noted by Christina von Nolcken, "*Piers Plowman*, the Wycliffites, and *Pierce the Plowman's Crede*," *YLS* 2 (1988): 91.

⁵¹ This will be considered below in chapter Six.

⁵² *Crede*, ll.9-10.

⁵³ This lay curriculum is outlined succinctly in a sermon dated by Ross to the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century. "For-as-muche as God byddeþ euery man Cristen and wymman to vndirstond is lawe, and all mowe not com to þe perfite vndirstondynge þer-of for sotelte of þis lawe and oþur werldely occupacions, where-by þei muste gete hure sustinaunce, holychurche haþ ordeyned þat men muste conne and kepe in speciall þe xij articles of þe fey3the, þe wiche euery Cristen man muste beleue, and þe x Commaundementes, þe vij werkes of mercye, þe v wittes, and absteine þe fro þe vij dedely synnes... þe Pater Noster:" W.O. Ross (ed.), *Middle English Sermons* (London, 1960), pp.13-14.

⁵⁴ As we have seen above (p.76), Langland placed a strong emphasis upon the teaching of the Creed as a prime duty of the clergy. See *PPl.*, B XV ll.606ff.

⁵⁵ *Crede.*, l.5.

implication that the priest's literacy is inferior to that of the lay narrator.⁵⁶

The specific aim of the narrator, therefore, is to find someone who is able to teach him the Creed; someone “other lewed or lered that lyueth therafter,”⁵⁷ and he describes the beginning of his quest thus:

... first y fraynede the freres and they me fulle tolden
That all the frute of the fayth was in here foure ordres,
And the cofres of cristendam & the keye bothen,
And the lok of beleve lyeth loken in her hondes.⁵⁸

In January 1343, Pope Clement VI had issued the bull, *Unigenitus Dei filius*, which provided the earliest comprehensive exposition of the Church's doctrine of indulgences. The theory was based upon the notion of the Church as a treasury: all Christians had an account of grace, which was either in credit or in debit according to the moral quality of the life led by the individual. This treasury needed to be unlocked for the individual sinner through the agency of the Petrine keys held by the Pope.⁵⁹ The *Crede* poet, therefore, superficially uses the “cofres of cristendom & the keye bothen” in order to refer to the apostolic claims of the Orders, although the ironic nature of the poet's choice of the metaphor of a treasury is thrown into sharp relief in the context of later descriptions of the avaricious friars encountered by the narrator.

At this point the narrator is describing what would, taken at face value, appear to be a reasonable course of action to anyone requiring instruction in matters of belief and finding their parish priest inadequate for the task. After all, throughout the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the friars had established themselves at the forefront of theological

⁵⁶ On the priest's duties regarding teaching and examination of the articles of faith, see Spencer, *English Preaching*, p.210.

⁵⁷ *Crede.*, l.18.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, ll.28-31.

⁵⁹ For my synopsis, I am indebted to Diana Wood, *Clement VI: The Pontificate and Ideas of an Avignon Pope* (Cambridge, 1989), pp.32-34.

study in the universities of Europe.⁶⁰ At the same time, their militant programme of vernacular preaching at the heart of urban communities afforded them a prominence in spiritual matters which could go some way towards supporting the claim that they held “the lok of beleve,” which only they could open for their listeners.

This pedagogical authority, however, is already partially undermined by the narrator's expressed criteria for the selection of a teacher, “other lewed or lered,” whose life is in complete accord with the tenets of the Christian faith. The educated status of the prospective teacher is unimportant, for it is the Creed itself which contains the truth, and it is the moral quality of the teacher - the congruence of words and works - which is of the essence; a view which may be contrasted with the more specifically clerical concerns of Langland, discussed in my previous chapter. This fundamental importance given to the text is a characteristic of Lollard thought, as succinctly expressed in the Wycliffite *Vae Octuplex*:

And if 3ow wole examyne feip, where hit be trowpe of Cristus chirche, loke where
pat it ys growndyt in ony article of þe crede; if it be not growndet þere, tak it not as
byleue.⁶¹

It is interesting to note that although, within the poem, the narrator first addresses a Franciscan, he reveals that “A Carm me hath y-couenaunt the Crede me to teche.”⁶² That this intervention from the Carmelite should occur before the narrator has actively begun his quest possibly satirizes the order's claims to antiquity, traditionally ascribing their foundation to the Old Testament prophet Elijah, who defeated the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.⁶³

⁶⁰ Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, pp.298-299. An inflated pride in this status is implied in the boast, attributed to the friars in general, that “all the frute of the fayth was in here foure ordres:” *Crede*, l.29. This is itself an intensified version of the friars’ claim in *Piers Plowman* that Dowel dwells, and always has dwelt, with them: *PPL*, B VIII ll.18-19.

⁶¹ *Vae octuplex*, in *English Wycliffite Sermons* vol. 2, ed. Pamela Gradon (Oxford, 1988), ll.310-312.

⁶² *Crede*, l.38.

⁶³ I Kings 18.19-40. See also the Carmelite’s claims in *Crede*, ll.382-383. A brief summary of the tradition is given in Robert A. Koch, “Elijah the Prophet, Founder of the Carmelite Order,” *Spec* 34 (1959): 547-548. Although widely accepted, this account of the order’s origins was subject to attack in the fourteenth century. T.S.R. Boase, “A Seventeenth Century Carmelite Legend based on Tacitus,” *JWCI* 3 (1939-1940): 108, draws

More generally, it is also perhaps indicative of the way in which the poet perceives the foundation of the fraternal orders as an unasked-for solution to society's spiritual malaise.⁶⁴ Their position within the religious life of the community is purely self-created; they are "newe feyned sectis,"⁶⁵ neither ordained by God nor desired by man.⁶⁶

The narrator's encounters with the friars form a continuous loop of self-criticism - the Franciscan condemns the Carmelites, the Dominican condemns the Austins, and so on - and the narrator soon realises that this is not to his purpose. When ineffectually absolved by the Franciscan, he reflects that

... Here semeth litel trewthe:
First to blamen his brother and bacbyten him foule,
Theire-as curteis Crist clereliche saide,
"Whow myght-tou sen in thine brother eighe a bare mote loken,
And in thyn owen eighe nought a bem toten?"⁶⁷

Indeed, there is "litel trewthe" in the Franciscan's hypocritical shortcomings, as illuminated by his extended tirade against the Carmelites, and this is illustrated by the deviation of the practice from the absolute truth of the Bible⁶⁸. There is, however, a truth in the criticisms themselves - a truth of social observation which reflects a tradition of antifraternality criticism

attention to one such attack by John Danewych, Chancellor of Cambridge, in 1374.

⁶⁴ Although the narrator declares that "first y fraynede the freres" (*ibid.*, l.28), it is subsequently suggested that this is more by chance than by design (ll.32-33).

⁶⁵ *The Lanterne of Lighte*, ed., Lilian Swinburn (London, 1917), p.38. On the Lollard connotations of the much-used phrase "newe sectis," see Hudson, "Lollard Sect Vocabulary," p.171 & n.32.

⁶⁶ The notion of the friars being outside the "order" of the Church was a key element of Fitzralph's antifraternality (see Szittyá, *Antifraternality Tradition*, pp.123-151) which, by the end of the fourteenth century, had taken on specifically Lollard implications: see Hudson, "Lollard Sect Vocabulary," p.171; Barr, *Signes and Sothe*, pp.119-121.

⁶⁷ *Crede*, ll.138-142.

⁶⁸ Matthew, 7.3-5. The recurrent satirical pattern is discussed in David Lampe, "The Satiric Strategy of *Peres the Plowman's Crede*," in *The Alliterative Tradition in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Bernard S. Levy and Paul E. Szarmach (Kent, Ohio, 1981): 70-72.

reaching back to *Piers Plowman* and even earlier works,⁶⁹ as can be demonstrated by a brief comparison with *Wynnere and Wastoure*, perhaps written as much as fifty years earlier.⁷⁰

Wynnere and Wastoure, possibly written by a layman,⁷¹ is primarily a poem of economic concerns.⁷² Avaricious friars are consigned to the ranks of Wynnere's army, but the poet seems to consider this to be a fact of life, rather than a target for particular invective. Yet the heraldic banners borne by the four orders identify specific characteristics, absent from Langland's more sweeping antifraternality, which the poet of *Crede* would take up and embellish in his concern for the corruptions of the Church. The closest point of comparison is in the description from *Wynnere and Wastoure* of the Franciscans' banner:

The thirde banere one bent es of blee whitte
With sexe galeys I see of sable withinn,
And iche one has a brown brase with bokels twayne.⁷³

The same criticism may be found in *Crede*:

Fraunces bad his bretheren barfote to wenden;
Nou han thei buclad schon for bleynynge of her heles,
And hosen in harde weder for y-hamled by the ancle,
And spicerie sprad in her purse to parten where hem lust.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ A monastic example of such criticism, for example, may be found in a letter from the Prior of Norwich, dated c.1360. The letter concerns the vital role played by Adam Easton in silencing the mendicants who, it is claimed, "are enemies...of all churchmen, loosing their backbiting mouths at everyone:" Pantin, *English Church in the Fourteenth Century*, p.176.

⁷⁰ The date of *Wynnere and Wastoure* is generally placed at around 1352. For a summary of the arguments, see Turville-Petre, *Alliterative Poetry of the Later Middle Ages*, pp.38-39. The most extreme opposition to this view is that expressed by Lawton, who suggests that *Wynnere and Wastoure* was itself influenced by *Piers Plowman*: Lawton, "The Unity of Middle English Alliterative Poetry," pp.80-81.

⁷¹ Lay authorship was first suggested in the introduction to *A Good Short Debate Between Winner and Waster*, ed. Israel Gollancz (London, 1920), p.vi (this edition not paginated - I have numbered from title page). Most recently, Trigg has written of the poet's involvement in contemporary urban politics, but finds no conclusive evidence to suggest either lay or clerical status. See *Wynnere and Wastoure*, ed. Stephanie Trigg (Oxford, 1990), pp.xxi-xxii.

⁷² On *Wynnere and Wastoure* and contemporary economic theory, see Lois Roney, "Winner and Waster's 'Wyse Wordes': Teaching Economics and Nationalism in Fourteenth-Century England," *Spec* 69 (1994): 1070-1100.

⁷³ *Wynnere and Wastoure*, in Turville-Petre, *Alliterative Poetry of the Later Middle Ages*, ll.156-158.

⁷⁴ *Crede*, ll.298-301.

Although they claim to “folwen fully Fraunceses rewle,”⁷⁵ the Austin speaker in *Crede* uses the sandals as an example of deviation from the rule, which progresses by degrees to implications of immorality, with the possession of spices, presumably as gifts for women “where hem lust.”⁷⁶

The Dominican banner with its globe of light in the blackness, although using iconography closely associated with the Order,⁷⁷ appears also to relate to traditional accusations of pride:

The fourte banere one the bent es brayde appon lofte
With bothe the brerdes of blake, a balle in the myddes,
Reghte siche as the sone es in the someris tyde
When it hase moste of þe mayne one Missomer Euen.⁷⁸

When in *Crede*, the Dominican claims spurious biblical authority for his Order’s supremacy,⁷⁹ it is no coincidence that the narrator’s retort, based on Luke 10:18, refers to the pride of Satan, another “bearer of light.”⁸⁰ The boars’ heads of the Carmelites was a popular tavern sign,⁸¹ and it is in a tavern that the *Crede* poet encounters the two Carmelites.⁸² The relationship with the Austins’ belts, shining with the sharpening of razors, is less obvious, but I would suggest that it may allude to the reputation of viciousness in

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.291.

⁷⁶ C.f. *The Orders of Cain*, in Rossell Hope Robbins (ed.), *Historical Poems of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (New York, 1959), ll.55-8; “and also many a dyuers spyse/ In bagges about þai bere/ Al þat for women is plesand/ Ful redy certes haue þai.”

⁷⁷ N.R. Havely, “The Dominicans and their Banner in *Wynnere and Wastoure*,” in *N&Q* 228 (June 1983): 207-9.

⁷⁸ *Wynnere and Wastoure*, ll.163-166.

⁷⁹ *Crede*, 1.257.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, ll.262-3, see also 1.355. We may assume that, in making this connection between the Dominican’s pride and the pride of Satan, the *Crede* poet hints that the fall of the Dominican Order, who in this period were very much favoured by the court, was imminent. On the temporal status of the Dominicans in the years leading up to the close of the fourteenth century, see Clarke, “Some Secular Activities of the English Dominicans,” pp.1-60.

⁸¹ *Crede.*, 1.175. Turville-Petre, *Alliterative Poetry*, p.50 n.175.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 1.339.

their attacks on other orders,⁸³ perhaps with a temper which causes the Austin friar of the *Crede* to become “almost...madde in mynde” when he hears of the Franciscan's claims.⁸⁴

It may be seen, therefore, that the friars speak an established “trewthe” as evinced by literary tradition, but not *the* “trewthe,” that “tresor the trieste on erthe,”⁸⁵ in the words of Langland's Holi Chirche, which may be found in the Creed itself. Consequently, the narrator must look elsewhere:

Thanne turned y me forthe and talked to my-selue
Of the falshede of this folk - whou feithles they weren.⁸⁶

The half-way point in the *Crede*'s progression sees the narrator thrown back into isolated despair, “wepyng for sorowe,”⁸⁷ at the realisation that the “lered” men to whom he first turned cannot teach him the Creed, for they emphatically do not fulfill the expressed condition of living in accordance with Holy Writ.⁸⁸ Experience and observation have paved the way for the later denunciation of theological dispute,⁸⁹ but at this point the questioning of the “lewed” is presented as the only course open to the narrator; sophistication has failed, and he is left to assay the wisdom of one who possesses the authority of “goodnesse of gost” alone - Piers.

Piers, as he appears in *Crede*, is obviously derived from Langland's figure, but is greatly simplified. Whereas Langland's Piers is “a guide whose authority does seem

⁸³ James Dean, *Six Ecclesiastical Satires* (Kalamazoo, 1991), p.3.

⁸⁴ *Crede*, l.280.

⁸⁵ *PPL.*, B II.137.

⁸⁶ *Crede*, 418-9.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, l.420.

⁸⁸ They cannot expound upon the tenets of the faith and “lyueth thereafter:” *Ibid.*, l.18.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, ll.826-7.

absolute,” but who “appears only intermittently and behaves incomprehensibly,”⁹⁰ he is here given an extended presence and uncompromising directness of speech which dominate the latter half of the poem. It is also important to note that he is not the Piers of John Ball and the Essex commons.⁹¹ Wyclif himself was politically conservative and, in spite of accusations laid by chroniclers, there are no grounds to believe any of the alleged associations between Ball and Wycliffe or, more broadly, the 1381 rebels and Wycliffite teaching.⁹² In surveying contemporary and slightly later accounts of the 1381 uprising, Bowers has suggested that clerical historians drew the connection between the rebels and Wyclif in order to buttress the solidarity between Church and state. So successful was this propaganda exercise that

by the second decade of the fifteenth century any manner of social disturbance or treason against the throne... was almost automatically blamed on Lollard instigation.⁹³

It is even tempting to speculate that the independent adoption of Piers by both rebels and Lollards bestowed greater credibility upon contemporary suspicions of common interest. The writer of the *Crede*, however, is explicit in his support of the social *status quo*,⁹⁴ and John of Gaunt's patronage of Wyclif, along with the views of the “Lollard Knights” of the court,⁹⁵ stand as conclusive evidence of the appeal of Lollardy across all social classes.

The description of Piers and his family toiling in the barren landscape has been

⁹⁰ Von Nolcken, “*Piers Plowman*, the Wycliffites, and *Piers the Plowman's Crede*,” p.84.

⁹¹ A thought-provoking analysis of the rebels’ use of *Piers Plowman* may be found in Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, pp.102-139.

⁹² Margaret E. Aston, “Lollardy and Sedition,” *Past and Present* 17 (1960), pp.4-5. A good example of a politically conservative, yet nonetheless reformist, Lollard text is *Of Servants and Lords*, in Matthew, *English Works of Wyclif*, pp.227-243, which commences with the assertion that “seruauntis schullen trewely & gladly serue to here lordis or maistris,” and closes by stating that responsibility for clerical reform lies with temporal “lordis.”

⁹³ John M. Bowers, “*Piers Plowman* and the Police: Notes toward a History of the Wycliffite Langland,” *YLS* 6 (1992): 4-5.

⁹⁴ The *Crede* poet is firm in his objections to the advancement of “beggars brols:” *Crede*, ll.744 ff.

⁹⁵ On the identification of the “Lollard Knights” within the wider court circle, see K.B. McFarlane, *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights* (Oxford, 1972), pp.148-176.

described as an “unforgettable vignette...from a side of life Chaucer does not choose to depict in detail,”⁹⁶ but I do not think that the pictorial quality of the description should blind the reader to the allegorical significance. The narrator, let down by self-appointed authorities, is left to find “trewthe” in a landscape as psychologically resonant as any described in *Gawain and the Green Knight* or, indeed, Langland's “wildernessee.”⁹⁷ Although working within the tradition of the “alliterative revival,” the *Crede* poet eschews the common convention of the dream-vision, replacing the “merveillous swevene” with a waking vision of uncharacteristic bleakness which mirrors the spiritual wasteland left by the corruption of the friars.⁹⁸ A more overtly allegorical parallel may be found in *Piers Plowman*. Patience, after describing the transitory “summer” of worldly riches, turns to the patient poor:

Ac beggeris about Midsommer bredlees thei soupe,
And yet is wynter for hem worse, for weetshoed thei gange,
Afurst soore and afyngred, and foule yrebuked
And arated of riche men, that ruthe is to here...
Now, Lord, sende hem somer, and som maner joye,
Hevene after hir hennes goyng, that here han swich defaute!⁹⁹

In *Crede*, Piers and his family are, in effect, the poor who stand “weetshoed” in the cold of their earthly winter, assured of the eternal summer of heaven.

Within this landscape, the family provides an image of fertility which not only contrasts with the sterility of the friars,¹⁰⁰ but also with the landscape. Yet, at the same time,

⁹⁶ H.S. Bennett, *Chaucer in the Fifteenth Century*, (Oxford, 1947), p.72.

⁹⁷ *PPl.*, B Prologue l.12.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, B Prologue l.11.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, B XIV ll.159-164.

¹⁰⁰ As noted by Barr, *Piers Plowman Tradition*, p.228 n.455.

the figures are *of* that landscape; as Piers' wife stands "Barfote on the bare ijs,"¹⁰¹ the direct physical contact is compounded and intensified by the repeated adjective. The precise implications of this barren landscape are hard to pin down, as it is so rich in allusion, but it is tempting to view its ultimate source in relation to Langland: it resonates with the sterility of the *ecclesia carnalis* in the aftermath of the fall of the Barn of Unity. Yet this bleak landscape is paradoxically the ideal place for the cultivation of true devotion. The only structures the narrator of *Crede* has encountered are the sordid tavern and the elaborate Dominican house,¹⁰² both of which have been occupied by materially wealthy, but spiritually destitute, clerics, so it is fitting that truth should be found away from such corrupt enclaves.¹⁰³ For the Lollard writer, the physical church was viewed with distrust:

Sopely in þe olde lawe was salomons temple a figure of þe chirche in þe newe lawe, but not þat the chirche shulde be siche, but fre & large vndir þe cope of heuene, & stonde in vertues of mannus soule; but antichrist wole close it nou in coolde stones þat moten perisshe.¹⁰⁴

Piers' struggle in this desolate landscape to subsist by means of the "four rotheren hym by-forn that feble were worthen,"¹⁰⁵ with its resonances of the "foure grete oxen" of *Piers Plowman*,¹⁰⁶ suggests the individual's struggle in this spiritual wasteland to "tilie and trauaile

¹⁰¹ *Crede*, l.436. It will be remembered that St. Francis had "bad his brethren barfote to wenden" (l.298): Piers and his family effectively carry out this injunction whilst the friars who bear Francis' name fall into what the poet perceives as luxury. It is also tempting to see in this powerful linking between the lay Christian family and the ground on which they struggle for a living implications of Lollard claims to the "ground of scripture." For the Lollard significance of the term "ground," see Hudson, "Lollard Sect Vocabulary," pp.171-172.

¹⁰² Significantly, the description of the Dominican house (*Crede*, ll.172-207) is one of the few instances in the poem in which the poet adopts a higher register than his customary plain alliterative style. As Barr has noted, this embellishment, when employed, may be equated with a betrayal of spiritual truth (Barr, *Signes and Sothe*, pp.39-40): it effectively enacts a "glossing" of the unadorned "ground" which is tended by Piers.

¹⁰³ Whilst this indicates somewhat different allegorical use of structures than that found in *Piers Plowman* (see chapter Three above), it is nevertheless in the aftermath of the fall of Unity that Conscience makes the final resolution to "seken Piers the Plowman:" *PPL.*, B XX l.383.

¹⁰⁴ Matthew, *English Works of Wyclif*, p.478.

¹⁰⁵ *Crede*, l.431.

¹⁰⁶ *PPL.*, B XIX l.264.

as trewe lyf asketh.”¹⁰⁷ Although the friars may claim to hold the “cofres of cristendom,”¹⁰⁸ it is Piers who cultivates the treasure of truth. This is the Piers seized upon from Langland; not necessarily a Lollard, but certainly an authority on individual piety.

However, before this authority is recognised, the poet first establishes a bond of equality between the narrator and Piers. “I seigh a sely man,”¹⁰⁹ says the narrator upon first observing Piers, a description reinforced by the line, “the sely man sighede sore.”¹¹⁰ Almost immediately following this second instance, Piers greets the narrator, “Sely man, why syghest thou so harde?”¹¹¹ Whilst the repetition of “sely” holds connotations of Lollard “poor priests,”¹¹² the similarity of phrase attests to an equality between the two figures, with neither claiming authority. This contrast with the stance taken by the friars is further underlined by Piers’ immediate offer of physical succour from his meagre store,¹¹³ a display of charity directly opposed to the acquisitive greed which the narrator has encountered earlier.

The narrator does not immediately ask anything of Piers, merely stating his problem, to which Piers responds by confirming that which has earlier been observed. Whilst this furthers the idea of equality, it paradoxically attributes authority to Piers, for rather than indulging in the “blaming and backbiting” of the friars, or even using the evidence of his own eyes, he uses the absolute “trewthe” of scriptural authority to support his claims. This

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, B Prologue l.120.

¹⁰⁸ *Crede*, l.30.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, l.421. In the context of the poem, I feel that it is reasonable to read “sely” in this case as having the composite meaning of both “blessed” and “poor.” *The Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. “seli” 1 (a); 3 (b).

¹¹⁰ *Crede*, l.442.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, l.444.

¹¹² Hudson, “Lollard Sect Vocabulary,” pp.170-171.

¹¹³ *Crede.*, ll.445-6.

exposure of hypocrisy in the service of “trewthe” is an important Lollard theme. Expounding upon Luke 12:2,¹¹⁴ the author of the Wycliffite text *Of the Leaven of the Pharisees* writes that

Here Crist menip þat men schulden be war and oppynly telle þe trewþe aȝenst þis ypocrisie; for þouȝ it be now hid it schal be schewid at þe laste at þe day of dom.¹¹⁵

In common with Langland in *Piers Plowman* - and, indeed, with Bromyard and the anonymous Wycliffite writer discussed above - the *Crede* poet feels that it is necessary to justify his condemnation with scriptural quotation, in this case Matthew 7:15, which warns of “false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” This is an anticlerical commonplace, being found in the mid-thirteenth century writings of William of St. Amour,¹¹⁶ as well as in such influential poems as *Le Roman de la Rose* and *Piers Plowman*,¹¹⁷ which was wholeheartedly appropriated by Lollard writers.¹¹⁸

It is not until the narrator is made aware of Piers’ identity, however, that authority is tacitly acknowledged by the asking of a direct question:

“A Peres!” quath y tho, “Y pray the, thou me telle
More of this tryflers, hou trechurly thei libbeth.”¹¹⁹

The narrator here recognises the “trewthe” behind Piers’ words, and perhaps he also recognises his literary reputation. The reader is instantly reminded of Will’s meeting with Piers in *Piers Plowman*:

“Piers the Plowman!” quod I tho, and al for pure joye

¹¹⁴ “For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known...”

¹¹⁵ *Of the Leaven of Pharisees*, in *English Works of Wyclif*, p.20.

¹¹⁶ Szittyá, *Antifraternal Tradition*, p.54.

¹¹⁷ *Romance of the Rose*, ll.11713 ff. *PPL*. B XV l.116.

¹¹⁸ For example, *Upland's Rejoinder*, ll.213-4. The text also forms the basis of the Wycliffite *Vae Octuplex*, see ll.1-2.

¹¹⁹ *Crede*, ll.474-5.

That I herde nempne his name anoon I swowned after.¹²⁰

In the same way that John Ball must have expected a certain amount of recognition from his audience concerning Piers,¹²¹ I feel that the utterance, “Ah Peres!”¹²² is one of recognition, perhaps mixed with relief at having found a suitable teacher at last; one with a reputation for authoritative teaching on issues of individual devotion, founded upon a true relationship with Holy Church.¹²³

Even when this authority is established, however, Piers does not adopt the airs of the friars, commencing his address with “Dere brother,”¹²⁴ referring to the equality of the company of God's elect. As he himself says, he is “Peres...the pore man, the plowe-man;”¹²⁵ he is the authoritative ploughman figure derived from Langland, but before this he is “the pore man,” like his listener.

“Ther is no peny in my palke to payen for my mete,
I haue no good ne no gold but go thus abouten,
And trauaile ful trewlye to wynnen withe my fode,”¹²⁶

declares the narrator, in a piece of self-description which could be applied with equal appropriateness to Piers. Once more, this draws attention, highlighted by Piers' open generosity,¹²⁷ to the opposition between the honest poverty of Piers and the narrator, and the hypocritical affluence of the friars.

¹²⁰ *PPL.*, B XVI ll.18-19.

¹²¹ Hudson, “Epilogue; The Legacy of *Piers Plowman*,” p.252. See also Middleton, “Audience and Public of *Piers Plowman*,” pp.119-20.

¹²² It should be noted that the exclamation mark is editorial, but I do not think that this affects my argument.

¹²³ See chapter Three.

¹²⁴ *Crede*, l.482. This open declaration of fraternity may be contrasted with the term “brother” as used by the Franciscan in l.130, which denotes a relationship contingent upon financial transaction.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, l.473.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, ll.399-401.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, ll.445-446.

In this way, the implications of the quest for a teacher “other lewed or lered” are made explicit, for in spite of the initial declaration of open-mindedness, the poet has resolutely worked towards a conclusion, “grounded” both in gospel and in experience, that the “lewed” carry greater authority than the “lered.”¹²⁸ This is reflected in the deference, evinced by the narrator's lack of interruption, accorded to Piers’ speech - a deference akin to that of Chaucer towards his pilgrims as he records “as ny as evere he kan / everich a word.”¹²⁹ However, whereas Chaucer effectively minimises his role within the *Canterbury Tales* to that of a compiler,¹³⁰ the *Crede* poet distances himself still further and adopts the role of a mere scribe.¹³¹ In this way, the poet adds weight to the apparently unedited utterances of Piers, and at the same time maximises the contrast between the unassuming Piers and the friars, who would “in multitude of men ben maysters y-called.”¹³² With specific reference to the poet of the *Ovide Moralisé*, Copeland has suggested that by the very act of invoking the *compiler's* conventional regard for the integrity of his materials, the poet claims “canonical privilege” for his own work.¹³³ In a similar fashion, the *Crede* poet, in invoking the widely-known figure of Piers as his mouthpiece, is able to appropriate a higher authority for his

¹²⁸ On the use of experience as a legitimate adjunct to “authorities” in sermon literature of the period, see Siegfried Wenzel, “Chaucer and the Language of Contemporary Preaching,” *SP* 73 (1976): 151-152. The conclusion reached by the *Crede* poet is in marked contrast to that suggested by Langland, who depicts Mede as the only agency through which the “lewed” may be advanced. See *PPL.*, B III ll.32-34.

¹²⁹ *CT.*, I (A) ll.732-3. On Chaucer, see chapter Five.

¹³⁰ On Chaucer’s self-presentation as a “lewed compiler,” see Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, pp.190-210.

¹³¹ The hierarchy of scribe, compiler, commentator, and author (scriptor, compiler, commentator, and auctor) is clearly delineated by Bonaventure in his commentary on Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*: Bonaventura, *Opera omnia* vol.1, p.15. A translation may be found in A.J. Minnis and A.B. Scott with David Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c.1100-c.1375: The Commentary Tradition* (revised, Oxford, 1991), p.231, and the passage is discussed in Minnis, *Theory of Authorship*, pp.94-5.

¹³² *Crede*, 1.498. Citing Matthew 23.10, “Neither be ye called masters, for one is your Master, even Christ,” references to the self-aggrandizement of the friars was an antifraternal commonplace. See Szittyá, *Antifraternal Tradition*, pp.32-34.

¹³³ Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1991), p.118.

Lollard polemic.

“Lewed” and “lered,” therefore, become clearly associated with right and wrong, the former living according to the simple “trewthe” of the gospel, whilst the latter are “kynrede of Caym,”¹³⁴ created by the devil, who corrupt the Church from within.¹³⁵ The association of the friars with Cain is a Lollard commonplace,¹³⁶ the severity of which, in this case, appears to be mediated by the admission that

... Austines ordynaunce was on a good trewthe,
And also Domynikes dedes weren dernlich y-vsed,
And Frauncis founded his folke fulliche on trewthe,
Pure parfit prestes in penaunce to lybben,
In loue and in lownesse and lettinge of pride,
Grounded on the godspell as God bad him-selue.¹³⁷

The phrase “grounded on the godspell as God bad him-selue” is perhaps the ultimate Wycliffite seal of approval upon any action, and indeed the Lollard text upon *The Rule and Testament of St. Francis*,¹³⁸ whilst anti-Franciscan in intention, is based upon approval of the *Rule* itself. Yet, the narrator may still assert that “some wikked wyght wroughte this orders,”¹³⁹ and not be contradicted by Piers. The equivocal stance upon the foundation of the Orders in *Crede* may here be contrasted with the attitude towards the Orders’ origins expressed in *Piers Plowman*. For all his antifraternality, Langland has nothing but praise for the Orders’ founding ideals, and on several occasions holds up Francis and Dominic as

¹³⁴ *Crede*, l.486.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, ll.681-6.

¹³⁶ “The adaptation of Middle English Legends of Cain (or Caim, as usage also had it) to help damn the mendicant orders became prominent about 1382, and the extended currency of the term ‘Caim’s Castles’ can be attributed to Wycliffe.” Aston, “Caim’s Castles,” p.45. See also Barr, *Signes and Sothe*, pp.126-127. A notable example of this antifraternality is “The Orders of Cain,” in Robbins, *Historical Poems*, ll.114-6: “Þus grounded caym thes four ordours/ Þat fillen þe world ful of errours/ & of ypocrisy.” See also *Of the Leaven of the Pharisees*, p.12, in which false friars are identified as “caynis breþren þat killyd his broþer fore his goode lyuyng.” Further references may be found in Szittyá, *Antifraternality Tradition*, pp.163-164, 196-197 & 229-230.

¹³⁷ *Crede*, ll.509-14.

¹³⁸ Printed in Matthew, *English Works of Wyclif*, pp.39-51.

¹³⁹ *Crede*, l.478.

examples to be followed:

Ancres and heremytes, and monkes and freres
Peeren to Apostles thorough hire parfit lyvyng.
Wolde nevere the feithful Fader that hise ministres sholde
Of tiraunts that teneth trewe men taken any almesse,
But doon as Antony dide, Domynyk and Fraunceys,
Beneit and Bernard bothe, whiche hem first taughte
To lyve by litel and in lowe houses by lele mennes almesse.¹⁴⁰

The apparent inconsistency of the *Crede* poet effectively conveys the extent to which the contemporary Orders are perceived as being divorced from the ideals of their founders. They may no longer claim descent from anyone other than Cain, the antithesis of Piers.¹⁴¹

As Cain rejected his ordained duty to God, so the friars have rejected the “ordynaunce” of their founders:

Ner Fraunceis or Domynik other Austen ordeynide
Any of this dotardes doctur to worthe,
Masters of dyvinitie her matens to leue,
And chereliche as a cheueteine his chambre to holden
With chymene and chapell and chesen whan him liste,
And serued as a souereine and as a lorde sitten.¹⁴²

Every aspect of their lifestyle is against that which was “ordeynide,” and the root of this deviation is the theological study which distracts from the act of worship and ultimately leads to complete involvement in secular rather than spiritual life - the overriding concern with the “glose...unteyned upon trewthe.”¹⁴³ Although the Lollards were prepared, perhaps grudgingly, to acknowledge multiple levels of meaning in scripture, the literal interpretation was considered paramount, providing the “ground and fundament” of all deeper understanding.¹⁴⁴ Consequently, it is those who offer the literal truth whom Piers cites as

¹⁴⁰ *PPL.*, B XV ll.415-421. See also B XV ll.230-231, in which Charity is said to have dwelled with the friars in the time of St. Francis, and B XX ll.251-252, in which Francis and Dominic are praised for their renunciation of temporal dominion “for love to be holye.”

¹⁴¹ A vivid depiction of Cain as ploughman is contained in “Mactacio Abel,” *The Wakefield Pageants in the Towneley Cycle*, ed. A.C. Cawley (Manchester, 1958), in which he is “ordand...with Sathanas the feynd” (l.465).

¹⁴² *Crede*, ll.579-84. See also ll.775-8.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, ll.515-6.

¹⁴⁴ Kendall, *Drama of Dissent*, pp.29-30.

examples of correct living, specifically Wyclif and Walter Brut.¹⁴⁵

Both Wyclif and Brut are defined as speakers of truth,¹⁴⁶ who are unjustly persecuted by the false accusations of friars; Wyclif is “lollede...with heretykes werkes,”¹⁴⁷ whilst it is said of Brut by his accusers that “he is an heretike and yuele byleueth.”¹⁴⁸ These accusations of heresy are, however, turned against the accusers, for they are thus portrayed as opposers of the truth. This reversal of institutional judgement is particularly apparent with reference to Wyclif. At the so-called “Earthquake Council” of May 1382, sixteen of the seventeen doctors of theology involved in the condemnation of Wyclif’s propositions were friars,¹⁴⁹ and it is these who are said to have “lollede him with heretykes werkes.”

Although by the time *Crede* was written, the pejorative term “Lollard” had become associated with holders of Wycliffite opinions, the immediate history of the term had been anything but specific.¹⁵⁰ The *Crede* poet exploits this ambiguity of meaning, his phrasing suggesting a double-edged usage of the word, encompassing both the accusations of the friars and also their actions. The implication is that through their persecution of Wyclif it is they who, to quote Langland’s words on false hermits, “Lollen aȝen þe byleue and þe lawe of holy churche.”¹⁵¹ Effectively, it is the authority of a corrupt institution to define heresy which is being denied for, as has been demonstrated, it is too much concerned with the material world. This authority is instead passed into the hands of Wyclif, Brut and, by

¹⁴⁵ *Crede*, ll.528ff & 657ff.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, ll.528 & 658.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, l.532.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, l.660.

¹⁴⁹ On the “Earthquake Council,” see K.B. McFarlane, *John Wycliffe and the Beginnings of English Conformity* (London, 1952), pp.105-7. For the twenty-four conclusions, see Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (London, 1963), pp.243-4.

¹⁵⁰ For a discussion of the term, see Scase, *Piers Plowman and the New Anticlericalism*, pp.149-60.

¹⁵¹ *PPL.*, C IX l.218.

extension, Piers himself.¹⁵²

Like Wyclif and Brut, Piers finally concludes the narrator's quest by offering to "techen the the trewthe and tellen the the sothe,"¹⁵³ and this "trewthe" is the Crede, which he emphatically describes as "fully the beleue."¹⁵⁴ This is all that the true Christian needs to know, and it is a knowledge which any true Christian has the authority to impart.¹⁵⁵ Once Piers, or the poet, has enumerated the clauses of the Creed, all that remains is the final valediction:

But all that euer I haue seyde soth it me semeth,
And all that euer I haue writen is soth, as I trowe,
And for amending of thise men is most that I write;
God wold hy wolden ben war and werchen the better!¹⁵⁶

In the closing lines of the poem, the kinship earlier established between Piers and the narrator is extended to embrace the poet himself, their voices merging into one and speaking with an authority derived directly from God.¹⁵⁷ There is a final prayer for "alle freres that faithfully lybben,"¹⁵⁸ but by this point it is clear that the reform of the friars is not really at issue. By going against what "trewthe" ordained, they have failed in their self-appointed role in society, rendering themselves irrelevant in the scheme of individual salvation.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵² The Lollard appropriation of the term "heretic" to describe the corrupt agents of the orthodox Church is vividly displayed in the text, "Of Prelatis," discussed earlier (pp.97-98), which uses the term frequently throughout.

¹⁵³ *Crede*, l.794.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, l.802. As we have seen above (p.103), this insistence upon the grounding of belief in the articles of the creed is a fundamental principle of Lollardy: *Vae octuplex*, ll.310-312.

¹⁵⁵ This is in contravention of the 15th conclusion of the "Earthquake Council." See Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, p.244.

¹⁵⁶ *Crede*, ll.836-9.

¹⁵⁷ Once more, the words of Luke 12:2 are taken as justification for criticism.

¹⁵⁸ *Crede*, l.847.

¹⁵⁹ It should be recalled that in *Piers Plowman* it is Piers himself who is the only qualified guide to Truthe. See *PPL.*, B V ll.538 ff..

At the close of *Piers Plowman* B passus XVIII, the narrator's visionary experience of salvation history leads him, along with his family, to the church, in order to "heere holly the masse, and to be housled after."¹⁶⁰ His final visions culminate in the attack on the Barn of Unity but, as discussed in the previous chapter, the narrator's trust in, and deference towards, the orthodox ideal of the institution of the Church, of which he is a part, remains undiminished. The Church, as it stands, must be reformed through the embracing by the clergy of the ideals embodied in Piers the ploughman.¹⁶¹ *Pierce the Plowman's Crede*, however, offers no such return to the body of the Church, either in a physical sense - the narrator remains with Piers outside the material Church - or in the wider, figurative sense. The narrator's initial problem - ignorance of the Apostle's Creed - is solved, but the necessity of examination by the priest which had initiated the quest is forgotten. Once the Creed, "fully the beleue" of every true Christian,¹⁶² is acquired, the role of the parish priest becomes redundant as it is usurped by the appropriated figure of Piers, who now functions as a role model, authoritative yet equal, for the laity. The penitential theme which we have noted in *Piers Plowman* is expunged, as orthodox devotional patterns are swept aside in favour of a community of "true Christian men," united beneath God alone.

Langland's readers appear to have taken Will at his word when he invited them to interpret "what this metels bymeneth," and they were quite willing to "dare" to speak out, even if only for a limited intended audience.¹⁶³ In writing a vernacular piece of such doctrinal

¹⁶⁰ *PPL.*, B XIX l.3.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, XX 381-387.

¹⁶² *Crede*, l.804.

¹⁶³ *PPL.*, B Prologue ll.209-210. *Crede* does not appear to be intended to make new converts to Lollardy, as a predisposition towards the causes of Wyclif and Brut is necessary for a sympathetic response to the introduction of these "authorities." The work may, therefore, be considered as an affirmation of Lollard strength of belief, most probably intended for circulation within existing Lollard circles, rather than as a "propaganda" piece.

import, Langland evidently did not anticipate the variety of possible interpretations which *Piers Plowman* would arouse amongst an audience with only a limited knowledge of the orthodox traditions to which his work related. The *Crede* poet, however, was able to appropriate aspects of Langland's work, perhaps naively but almost certainly deliberately, in order to present Piers as a Lollard mouthpiece and exemplar. Once he has strayed beyond the interpretative community for which he was created, Piers becomes what Langland would no doubt have seen as a further assailant upon the Barn of Unity.

In literature of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the significance placed upon ploughmen indicates that, in the wake of *Piers Plowman*, the figure became inextricably involved with anticlerical issues; assuming the accepted role of authoritative vernacular mouthpiece against corruption within the Church. I shall, over the next two chapters, discuss the ploughman in this context, beginning with a work from a very different *milieu* than *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* or, indeed, *Piers Plowman* itself, but which nonetheless bears witness to the anticlerical currency of the ploughman figure in the wake of *Piers Plowman*: Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

CHAPTER 5

PIERS PLOWMAN, ORTHODOX REFORM AND THE LAY VOICE: *THE CANTERBURY TALES*

Before addressing the issue of Chaucer's anticlericalism in the *Canterbury Tales*, I would first like to consider briefly the context in which Chaucer places this anticlericalism; the pilgrimage itself. For, as I hope to show in the present chapter, we may only grasp the full implications of Chaucer's anticlericalism if we read it with a constant awareness of the manner in which it is presented, and with an eye open to what I believe to be the pervasive influence of *Piers Plowman*. In view of these considerations, I shall preface my discussion of the *Canterbury Tales* by turning once more to what Langland had to say on the subject of pilgrimage:

Pilgrymes and palmeres plighen hem togidere
For to seken Seint Jame and seintes at Rome;
Wenten forth in hire wey with many wise tales,
And hadden leve to lyen al hire lif after.¹

The distaste with which Langland viewed the act of pilgrimage has already been noted: he considered it to be spiritually insufficient, lacking the necessary correlation with true piety.² Furthermore, as the above quote testifies, he knew the folk of the field well enough to know that they were likely to while away their journeys with tales of an unedifying nature which may even, in the words of Robert Mannyng, cause the listener to "falle ofte to velanye / To dedly synne or outhere folye."³ These are the tales of "Robyn Hood and Randolph Erl

¹ *PPL.*, B Prologue ll.46-49.

² See chapter Two above.

³ Robert Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, ll.49-50.

of Chestre” so beloved of Langland’s Sloth,⁴ and the ambiguity of the verb “lyen” suggests the inactivity of spiritual sloth following the merely physical show of piety. It is undoubtedly significant that one of the most telling portraits of this spiritual sloth in *Piers Plowman* is the outlandishly-attired pilgrim who, in spite of all his peregrinations and outward show of signs and souvenirs, has never even contemplated the inner pilgrimage to “St. Truth.”⁵ Indeed, the use of the word “plighte,” with its connotations of “troth,” ironically underscores the falseness of the earthly pilgrimage.⁶

This antipathy towards pilgrimage was not uncommon amongst reformers of the period, and whilst the most vehement denunciation came, characteristically, from Lollard critics, this was an extreme expression of what can be seen as a more general reformist concern. The early fifteenth-century Lollard William Thorpe, for example, professed the extreme opinion that

Siche pilgrymage is neither praisable ne thankful to God neither to any seint of God; sith in effecte alle siche pilgrymes dispisen God and alle hise seyntis. For the heestis of God thei wolen neither knowen nor kepe, neither thei wolen conforme hem to lyve vertuesly by ensauple of Crist and of his seyntis.⁷

Langland, as we have seen, belonged to a more conservative tradition of concerned, orthodox reformers.⁸ Yet those who encouraged this form of devotion remained at least as numerous as its critics, and pilgrimage remained a popular expression of piety throughout

⁴ *PPL.*, B V 1.397.

⁵ *Ibid.*, B V ll.515-536. On pilgrim souvenirs, see Michael Mitchiner, *Medieval Pilgrim and Secular Badges* (London, 1986); Jonathan Alexander and Paul Binski (eds.), *Age of Chivalry* (London, 1987), pp.218-224.

⁶ For the contemporary currency of the proverbial association of pilgrims with dishonesty, see Bartlett Jere Whiting and Helen Wescott Whiting (eds.), *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1968), p.446.

⁷ Douglas Gray (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Late Medieval Verse and Prose* (Oxford, 1988), p.15.

⁸ On contemporary criticisms of pilgrimage, see Ronald C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (London, 1977), pp.199-201. For royal restrictions on the mobility of pilgrims, see J.J. Jusserand, *English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages*, trans. Lucy Toulmin Smith (repr. London, 1961), pp.212-213.

the medieval period.⁹

It is not known if Chaucer himself ever undertook a pilgrimage,¹⁰ but it is reasonable to assume that the holiday behaviour of which Langland complains would be common knowledge, and Chaucer, in the course of his extensive travels, must surely have encountered many actual groups of pilgrims.¹¹ Bennett has gone so far as to suggest that it was Langland's lines which suggested the "literary potentialities" of the pilgrimage framework for the *Canterbury Tales*,¹² and whilst it is impossible to prove such a hypothesis, it is worth considering the likelihood of Chaucer being influenced to some extent by *Piers Plowman*. A comparison between the two works will provide a valuable frame of reference when addressing the nature of the anticlericalism which permeates much of the *Canterbury Tales*.

We have seen that although *Piers Plowman* was originally intended to edify a clerical audience, it became known to a broader lay public, and it would appear that Chaucer was one of these unintended readers. Long ago, Coghill averred that

There is...no lack of direct evidence that Chaucer read *Piers Plowman*; on the contrary, the direct evidence is strong.¹³

Citing parallel quotations, he demonstrated that analogues for all but the first and last lines

⁹ "Of þi bodie also þou arte bondon to ȝelde þi goode dette, to traveyll in þe seruyce of God, preyinge and fastyng and pilgrymage goyinge," states a sermon of the early fifteenth century: Ross, *Middle English Sermons*, p.42. It may indeed be possible that such exhortations became more necessary in direct response to the extreme stance taken by Lollard critics.

¹⁰ Sumption has suggested that the Jubilee indulgence of 1370 may have prompted Chaucer to make the pilgrimage to Canterbury himself, although there is no evidence to confirm this hypothesis. Jonathan Sumption, *Pilgrimage: An Image of Mediaeval Religion* (London, 1975), p.150.

¹¹ Chaucer, in describing the House of Rumour, refers to the same characteristics of tale-telling pilgrims as Langland in *The House of Fame*, ll.2121-2125: "And, Lord, this hous in alle tymes / Was ful of shipmen and pilgrimes, / With scrippes bret-ful of lesinges, / Entremedled with tydynges." Indeed, it is possible that exclamatory allusions to pilgrimage, and related saints' cults (for example, Saints Leonard [l.117], James [l.885] and Thomas [l.1131], along with Rome [l.1930]), may have been chosen specifically for their ironic resonance within a work which highlights the apparently random discrepancies between words and works.

¹² Bennett, "Chaucer's Contemporary," pp.320-321.

¹³ Nevill Coghill, "Two Notes on *Piers Plowman*," *MAE* 4 (1935): 90.

of Chaucer's portrait of the Ploughman could be found in *Piers Plowman*, although he stressed that the debt is "of idea and not of phrase."¹⁴ The case for the *General Prologue* of the *Canterbury Tales* having been influenced by Langland's prologue has subsequently been argued convincingly by a number of scholars,¹⁵ but the question remains: to what purpose was Chaucer's borrowing?

Bennett has suggested that Chaucer would have been instantly attracted to *Piers Plowman* by the similarity of its opening to works of his own, such as *The Parliament of Fowls* and *The Legend of Good Women*,¹⁶ but it is surely remarkable that he should adopt even the "idea" of the ploughman. We have seen that there was a precedent within pastoral literature for Langland's use of the ploughman figure,¹⁷ but there was altogether less reason why Chaucer should adopt this figure in a work aimed at a lay and, furthermore, gentle audience.¹⁸ Gower, also writing for an educated, predominantly lay audience, defined the ideal for ploughmen as "the men who seek food for us by the sweat of their heavy toil, as God Himself has decreed," but portrayed the actuality as "sluggish...scarce, and...grasping,"¹⁹ a condemnation which mirrors official criticism expressed in the Statute

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.90.

¹⁵ Bennett, "Chaucer's Contemporary," pp.310-324; Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire* (Cambridge, 1973), especially pp.208-212; Cooper, "Langland and Chaucer's Prologues," p.71-82.

¹⁶ Bennett, "Chaucer's Contemporary," pp.322-323.

¹⁷ See above, pp.42-45.

¹⁸ On Chaucer's audience, see Paul Strohm, "Chaucer's Audience," *LH* 5 (1977): 26-41; Scattergood, "Literary Culture at the Court of Richard II," pp.29-43; Paul Strohm, "Chaucer's Audience(s): Fictional, Implied, Intended, Actual," *ChR* 18 (1983-1984): 137-145; R.T. Lenaghan, "Chaucer's Circle of Gentlemen and Clerks," *ChR* 18 (1983-1984): 155-160. It should be noted that whilst there was undoubtedly a clerical element amongst Chaucer's audience, the audience as a whole, as Strohm has pointed out, was defined in terms of social hierarchy, rather than along any lay/clerical division: Strohm, "Chaucer's Audience," p.29.

¹⁹ John Gower, *Vox clamantis*, in *The Major Latin Works of John Gower*, trans. E.W. Stockton (Seattle, 1962), p.208. It should be noted, of course, that Gower frames his criticisms in Latin, thereby underlining the cultural differences between his educated audience and the lower orders which he condemns, as well as adding *gravitas* to his apocalyptic forebodings of social upheaval.

of Labourers of 1351.²⁰

In view of such widespread criticism of ploughmen, Chaucer's adoption of the ideal is all the more remarkable. Indeed, the unequivocal nature of the idealism employed in delineating the character of the Ploughman is, in itself, worthy of comment. Whilst it has long been generally held that the Knight, the Parson and the Ploughman represent the ideal for each of the "three estates," against which all other pilgrims should be measured, the way in which Chaucer treats each of these figures is subtly and, I would contend, significantly different.

The Parson's perfect life of selfless devotion to his flock is unquestionably exemplary, although, as Hudson has noted, to Chaucer's immediate audience of educated Londoners in the 1390s the way in which the ideal is expressed would surely have recalled Wyclif and his followers.²¹ As well as positively stressing the Parson's perfection, Hudson sees significance in what Chaucer chooses to omit:

there is no mention of the Parson's administration of the mass, no allusion to his role as confessor. Taking this with the biting condemnation of religious figures such as the Monk, Friar, Summoner, Pardoner and the mockery of the Prioress, the early critics' assertion of Chaucer's Wycliffite sympathies looks... credible.²²

Nevertheless, we should bear in mind that if the Parson had been a Lollard he would not have joined the pilgrimage.²³ It may be seen, therefore, that it was still possible at this time to be in agreement with elements of Wycliffite thought without adopting an identifiably heterodox position. More pertinent to Chaucer's representation of the ideal Parson is that his perfect union of words and works is consistently expressed by means of negatives. He

²⁰ For the Statute of Labourers, see Dobson, *The Peasants' Revolt*, pp.63-68.

²¹ Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, pp.390-394.

²² *Ibid.*, p.391. I would, however, question the characterization of the Monk's portrait as "biting condemnation:" see p.130 below.

²³ Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, pp.390-391. See also pp.121-122 above.

“ne lefte nat...to visite / The ferreste in his parisshe,” nor did he “sette...his benefice to hyre,” for “he was a shepherde and noght a mercenarie.”²⁴ These negatives accumulate, so that when the narrator finally declares that “a bettre preest I trowe that nowher noon ys,”²⁵ the reader is as acutely conscious of the failings of the many as of the virtue of the particular.

Although Jones’ study of Chaucer’s Knight has provoked little widespread revision of the Knight’s exemplary status,²⁶ it has nevertheless shown that there is room for a certain degree of moral doubt in the interpretation of the portrait. We must remember that whilst there were knights in Chaucer’s audience, there were also most certainly Lollards,²⁷ and the justness of combat, even in the case of one who had “foughten for oure feith,”²⁸ was at issue in Lollard doctrine.²⁹ Furthermore, it should not be overlooked that in idealising the Parson as a “shepherd,” the contrasting negative exemplar given is of a “mercenary,” the very epithet which Jones ascribes to the Knight. Whilst it would appear, therefore, that Chaucer portrays the ideal knight, it is possible that, within his audience, the criteria by which this

²⁴ *CT.*, I (A), ll.492-494, 507 & 514.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, I (A) l.524.

²⁶ Jones describes the Knight as “a typical mercenary of (Chaucer’s) day, whose career has been one of bloodshed and oppression and yet who pretends to the dignity of the old-style feudal retainer.” Terry Jones, *Chaucer’s Knight: The Portrait of a Medieval Mercenary* (London, repr. 1985), p.223. For a more typical approach, which views the Knight as exemplary within his social *milieu*, see Maurice Keen, “Chaucer’s Knight, the English Aristocracy and the Crusade,” in *English Court Culture in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. V.J. Scattergood and J.W. Sherborne (London, 1983), pp.45-61.

²⁷ McFarlane, *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights*, pp.180 & 182-185. For a review of the evidence linking Chaucer and his circle with Wycliffite thought, see David Lyle Jeffrey, “Chaucer and Wyclif: Biblical Hermeneutic and Literary Theory in the 14th Century,” in *Chaucer and Scriptural Tradition*, ed. David Lyle Jeffrey (Ottawa, 1984), pp.109-114.

²⁸ *CT.*, I (A), l.62.

²⁹ The Lollard tract, “Of Prelates,” for example, attacks the clergy’s support of the crusades in particular. “Also þei prechen not cristis gospel in word and dede bi whiche cristene men schuld lyue holy lif in charite, but blaberen forþe anticristis bullis to maken cristene men to werre eche wiþ opere in hope to wynne heuene bi siche werris:” Matthew, *English Works of Wyclif*, p.73. On the Church’s attitude to war, see Philippe Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, trans. Michael Jones (Oxford, 1984), pp.270-302. On the limits of medieval pacifism, see *ibid.*, pp.292-296. For a more extensive historical study, see Frederick H. Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1975), and Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (London, 1984), pp.44-63.

ideal is defined may not have been unquestioningly accepted.

In contrast to the Parson and the Knight, Chaucer's Ploughman is an unequivocally positive exemplar, fulfilling not only the duties of his temporal estate, but also the universal duties of the Christian, for all that he does is performed "for Cristes sake."³⁰ Stillwell has argued that "to portray an ideal Plowman is to express sufficient disapproval of the norm,"³¹ but there is no internal evidence to suggest that this is Chaucer's intention. On the contrary, there is no indication that the Ploughman's behaviour is in any way exceptional (as is the Parson's), nor is there any questioning of the standards by which that behaviour is judged (as is possibly the case with the Knight).

Although impossible to date with precision, the *General Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales* was, it is assumed, written in the late 1380s,³² when memories of the "Peasants' Revolt" of 1381 would still be fresh in people's minds; particularly the minds of government officials such as Chaucer. More specifically, the particular antagonism of the rebels towards John of Gaunt, Chaucer's patron, must surely have coloured his attitude towards labourers. The repercussions of the Revolt - in which, we must remember, Langland's ploughman had been adopted as a figurehead and rallying call for the dissenters - would undoubtedly still have been felt during the period of composition of the *General Prologue*, in which Chaucer was occupied as Justice of the Peace for Kent.³³ These social and political circumstances

³⁰ *CT.*, I (A), l.537.

³¹ Gardiner Stillwell, "Chaucer's Plowman and the Contemporary English Peasant," *ELH* 6 (1939): 290. This view is supported in Beatrice White, "Poet and Peasant," in *The Reign of Richard II: Essays in Honour of May McKisack*, ed. F.R.H. Du Boulay and Caroline M. Barron (London, 1971), pp.67-68; David Lawton, "English Poetry and English Society: 1370-1400," in *The Radical Reader*, ed. Stephen Knight and Michael Wilding (Sydney, 1977), p.157.

³² On dating, see *Riverside Chaucer*, pp.797-798.

³³ Dobson, *Peasants' Revolt*, pp.379-383. For documents pertaining to Chaucer's appointment as Justice of the Peace, see Martin M. Crow and Clair C. Olson (eds.) *Chaucer: Life-Records* (Oxford, 1966), pp.348-363. On Ball's reading of *Piers Plowman*, characterised as "willful, at least tangential to and mostly at odds with Langland's purposes," see Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, pp.111-121.

suggest that the Nun's Priest's satirical comparison of the unruly pursuit of "daun Russell" to "Jakke Straw and his meynee" would be more in keeping with the impression of the lower orders which one would expect from Chaucer.³⁴

One must conclude, then, that Chaucer decided to make use of Langland's model in spite of it already having been adopted by the rebels of 1381. This suggests that, as an undeniably perceptive reader, he saw something in the figure of Piers that was pertinent to his conception of the scheme of the *Canterbury Tales*.³⁵ Although we cannot know Chaucer's ultimate plan for the finished version of his work, I would suggest that other contemporary appropriations of the figure of the ploughman led to the deliberate, and prudent, decision to omit a *Plowman's Tale*, in order to limit the figure's didactic importance within the *Canterbury Tales*.³⁶ Nevertheless, Chaucer saw fit to include a Ploughman amongst his band of pilgrims in the *General Prologue*, if only devoting thirteen lines to this most exemplary member of the company. In spite of the brevity of the portrait, however, I believe that its inclusion, bearing with it the weight of its Langlandian associations, carries implications for our reading of the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole.

In comparing Langland's and Chaucer's prologues, Cooper has noted that "if the prologues to the two works are similar, they nonetheless serve to introduce vastly dissimilar poems."³⁷ Although this is clearly the case, with one poet producing an extended Christian

³⁴ CT., VII, l.3394.

³⁵ I shall argue below that although no other works referring directly to *Piers Plowman* survive from the fourteenth century, it is possible that Lollard appropriations of Piers were known to Chaucer.

³⁶ It may of course be that the absence of a *Ploughman's Tale* is simply another point in which *The Canterbury Tales* remains incomplete. However, I believe that Chaucer's responses to *Piers Plowman*, which I shall discuss in the present chapter, argue strongly for a lack of intention to add such a *Tale*. This absence, paradoxically, allowed for the interpolation of later spurious Tales, including those by parties with special interests. This will be discussed further in chapter Six.

³⁷ Cooper, "Langland's and Chaucer's Prologues," p.76.

allegory and the other an essentially secular story collection,³⁸ the similarities do not end with the prologues. Whilst it is useful to define Langland as a cleric and Chaucer as a layman, it is important to recognize that Church and society were, for practical purposes, far from divided. As Knapp has noted, “the fourteenth-century ‘Church’ is not one entity so much as a number of contending hierarchies and orders.”³⁹ all Christians were of the Church, and the Church existed within society. Langland’s religious allegory commences as his clerical narrator wanders “wide in this world.”⁴⁰ By the same token, Chaucer sets his stories within the narrative framework of a pilgrimage; itself a devotional activity which by its very nature involves wandering wide in the world.

The pilgrimage framework adopted by Chaucer has the further effect of imposing at least a superficial devotional equality upon all his characters, emphasising their essential community within the broadest definition of “the Church.” Approximately one third of the pilgrims are professionally attached to the institution of the Church, but others, notably the Knight and the Ploughman, are explicitly or implicitly members of the Christian community.⁴¹ The emphasis of each author is different, but both Langland and Chaucer are concerned with members of the Church “in this world.” However, whereas Langland unequivocally promotes the repristination of a corrupt Church and, by extension, world,⁴² Chaucer’s attitude to an increased flexibility in established values is, on the surface, more

³⁸ On the place of the *Canterbury Tales* within the genre of story collection, see Helen Cooper, *The Structure of the Canterbury Tales* (Athens, Georgia, 1984), pp.8-55.

³⁹ Knapp, *Chaucer and the Social Contest*, p.13. When considering these “contending hierarchies,” it is important not to neglect those outside the institutional framework of the Church.

⁴⁰ *PPL.*, B Prologue l.4.

⁴¹ The Knight, through his crusading campaigns, and the Ploughman, through both his devout lifestyle and his diligent obedience to the institutional requirement of tithe-paying, both define their temporal activities within the broader context of the Church. The Christian community to which all the pilgrims belong is made more pronounced in the *Parson’s Tale*, to which I shall return.

⁴² See chapter Three.

ambiguous. Writing of the Monk, for example, Chaucer states that

This ilke Monk leet olde thynges pace,
And heeld after the newe world the space.⁴³

This, one of the most difficult of Chaucer's portraits in which to discern with any confidence the authorial tone, effectively conveys a sense of moral pragmatism at play within the symbiotic relationship of Church and society.⁴⁴

Whilst the social inclusiveness of the *Canterbury Tales* inevitably binds the work to the Church, it is also worthy of note that, as Knapp has pointed out, "many, perhaps most, of the *Canterbury Tales* contain some sermon elements."⁴⁵ There is no clear evidence of direct borrowing from Langland in Chaucer's use of sermon materials, but he clearly made use of the same kind of sources: indeed, Wenzel has convincingly argued a case for Chaucer's familiarity with *Fasciculus morum*.⁴⁶ Although this adoption of the subjects and strategies of the preacher's art is obviously appropriate when placed in the mouths of the clerical pilgrims, it is somewhat surprising that this clerical discourse should also be attributed to lay pilgrims, and it would appear that Chaucer himself was acutely aware of the complexities involved. In spite of - or, rather, because of - his debt to *Piers Plowman*, he pointedly refrains from attributing the qualities of a preacher to his Ploughman. Before the implications of the ploughman's silence may be grasped fully,⁴⁷ however, we must first turn to the contest over the rights to the discourse of preaching which is so graphically

⁴³ CT., I (A), ll.175-176.

⁴⁴ Aers has characterised the portrait as one which "discloses traditional ideology as made anachronistic by the practices and new language of thriving Christian institutions in 'the newe world,'" defining a change in the nature of contemporary monastic practice, but making no overt moral judgement: Aers, *Chaucer*, pp.17-19.

⁴⁵ Knapp, *Social Contest*, p.77. On Chaucer and preaching, see Robert A. Pratt, "Chaucer and the Hand that Fed Him," *Spec* 41 (1966): 619-642; Siegfried Wenzel, "The Source for the *Remedia* of the *Parson's Tale*," *Traditio* 27 (1971): 433-453; Kate Oelzner Petersen, *The Sources of the Parson's Tale* (repr., New York, 1973); Wenzel, "Chaucer and the Language of Contemporary Preaching," pp.138-161.

⁴⁶ Wenzel, "Language of Contemporary Preaching," pp.146-155.

⁴⁷ On the silence of Chaucer's Ploughman, see below, pp.147-151.

dramatised in fragment III of the *Canterbury Tales*.

Both Szittyá and Cooper have discussed the manner in which the *Friar's Tale* not only initiates his clash with the Summoner, but also “quites” the *Wife of Bath's Tale*.⁴⁸ However, they do not fully explore the reasons for this animosity between the Friar and the Wife. Szittyá sees the initiation of the quarrel in the Friar's seemingly insulting (although, arguably, justified) comment upon the inordinate length of her prologue,⁴⁹ but the key to the conflict may be found before the Friar speaks, in the first interruption which the Wife must endure - that of the Pardoner:

“Now, dame,” quod he, “by God and by seint John!
Ye been a noble prechour in this cas.”⁵⁰

Although the issue upon which she expounds is, on the surface, the purely secular concern of marriage,⁵¹ the Wife has indeed commenced her prologue by taking on the mantle of the preacher:

Experience, though noon auctoritee
Were in this world, is right ynogh for me
To speke of wo that is in mariage.⁵²

If we accept that the Wife's prologue follows the Man of Law's epilogue,⁵³ the Wife adopts

⁴⁸ Szittyá, “Green Yeoman as Loathly Lady,” p.386-394; Cooper, *Structure of the Canterbury Tales*, pp.124-134.

⁴⁹ Szittyá, “Green Yeoman as Loathly Lady,” p.387. This view is shared by Cooper, *Structure of the Canterbury Tales*, p.125.

⁵⁰ *CT.*, III (D), ll.164-165.

⁵¹ It could, however, be argued in the context of fragment III and IV that the real issue is that of “maistrie” - a topic which extends to take in the so-called “Marriage Group” of tales originally posited by Kittredge: G.L. Kittredge, “Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage,” in *Chaucer Criticism: The Canterbury Tales*, ed. Richard Schoeck and Jerome Taylor (London, 1960).

⁵² *CT.*, III (D), ll.1-3.

⁵³ See N.F. Blake, *The Textual Tradition of the Canterbury Tales* (London, 1985), p.195 for a summary of the occurrences of this exchange in surviving manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales*. For further discussion of the placing of this passage, see *Riverside Chaucer*, p.862. My own view is that the appropriateness of this interlude to the issues raised in fragment III lends weight to the argument for placing it immediately before this group.

her preaching stance immediately after the “Shipman” has denied the right of the Parson, accused by the Host of Lollardy, to preach.⁵⁴ The Wife, therefore, may be seen to be responding to a debate on the authority to preach by claiming that authority for herself. That she initially claims such authority through personal experience, rather than through written validation, is paradoxically reminiscent of the doctrinally authoritative strategies of contemporary preaching, in which “comen experiens” could be cited in order to augment “authorities.”⁵⁵ Blamires has suggested that the Wife of Bath herself, in adopting a preaching stance specifically “grounded” in the Word of God, engages in Lollard Discourse.⁵⁶ That the “Lollard tendencies” within the Wife’s “preaching” remain covert is seen by Blamires to indicate a prudent “defensive strategy” on the part of Chaucer. However, I feel that in assessing the Wife’s Lollardy, one must apply the same caution as in considering the Parson: writing within only a few years of the condemnation of Wyclif’s doctrine and, more importantly, before the anti-Lollard statutes of the early fifteenth century, Chaucer was able to touch upon matters central to Lollard thought without necessarily aligning himself with the movement.

The Pardoner’s interruption of the Wife, unlike that of the Friar, carries no covert

⁵⁴ For manuscript variants which attribute this speech to the Wife of Bath, the Summoner or the Squire, see *Ibid.*, p.1126, and Blake, *Textual Tradition*, p.195. It may be significant in this case to note that the portraits of the Wife of Bath and the Parson are placed side by side in the *General Prologue*, suggesting that the reader should be attuned to comparisons between these two pilgrims.

⁵⁵ Grisdale, *Three Middle English Sermons*, p.77. Further instances are given in Wenzel, “Language of Contemporary Preaching,” pp.151-152. See p.109, n.125 re. *Crede*. As Schibanoff has noted, although able to cite authorities, the Wife herself does not have first-hand access to authoritative texts, being an “aural reader” dependant upon the literacy of her husbands: Susan Schibanoff, “‘Taking the Gold Out of Egypt’: the Art of Reading as a Woman,” in *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature: The Wife of Bath and All Her Sect*, ed. Ruth Evans and Lesley Johnson (London, 1994), pp.226-227. Her interaction with these authorities, therefore becomes in itself a part of her experience.

⁵⁶ Blamires argues that the Wife’s oft-used, self-justifying intensifier “express” [see, for example, *CT.*, III (D), ll.27-28, 59-62, 719-720] should be added to the “Lollard sect vocabulary” identified by Hudson: Alcuin Blamires, “The Wife of Bath and Lollardy,” *MAE* 58 (1989): 224-242.

hostility. Instead, their good-humoured exchange carries an air of complicity.⁵⁷ Lawler has noted that

the relation (of the *Parson's Tale*) to the Wife's prologue and to the *Pardoner's Tale* is complex; both these speakers draw much material directly from the *Parson's Tale*, but use it idiosyncratically.⁵⁸

I shall consider the *Parson's Tale* in due course, but for the moment it will suffice to note that what both characters derive from the Parson is, quite simply, preaching. As we have seen, the Wife is a “noble prechour,” who takes it upon herself to usurp the preaching authority of the Parson. Likewise, the *General Prologue* defines the Pardoner as a “noble ecclesiaste,” who “made the person and the peple his apes.”⁵⁹ Both figures are defined in terms of worldly success in their given professions, and both make use of lengthy prologues in which they expound upon their “praktike.” The Pardoner's interruption, therefore, may be taken as an acknowledgement of professional kinship in an area to which they both have dubious claims.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ For reasons which I shall outline below, I see neither criticism nor condescension in the Pardoner's interruption: for these interpretations, see Schibanoff, “Taking the Gold Out of Egypt,” p.226; Blamires, “Wife of Bath and Lollardy,” p.230. Whilst agreeing with Minnis that the interruption is “a spectacular case of the kettle's calling the pot black” [Alastair Minnis, “Chaucer's Pardoner and the ‘Office of Preacher,’” in *Intellectuals and Writers in Fourteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Cambridge, 1986), p.90], it should be stressed that the joke is made all the more forceful by the Pardoner's self-awareness in making this comment.

⁵⁸ Traugott Lawler, *The One and the Many in the Canterbury Tales* (Hamden, Connecticut, 1980), pp.161-162.

⁵⁹ *CT.*, I (A), ll.708 & 706. Cespedes notes that both the Wife of Bath and the Pardoner make use of Pauline epistles with which to bolster their arguments. Whilst defining both characters as “noble prechours,” however, Cespedes considers that there is an implied conflict between the two: Frank C. Cespedes, “Chaucer's Pardoner and Preaching,” *ELH* 44 (1977): 9-10. In view of the dramatic interaction of the the disputants within the fragment, I feel that the absence of a contesting *Pardoner's Tale* at this point lends support to my own reading of complicity.

⁶⁰ The Wife of Bath, as not only a member of the laity, but also a woman, is as far from accepted spiritual authority as it is possible to be. The significance of Chaucer's use of a laywoman to oppose clerical authority is noted, although not expanded upon, in Scase, *Piers Plowman and the New Anticlericalism*, p.172, and the relationship of the Wife of Bath to contemporary views on the (un-)suitability of women for preaching is investigated in Alastair Minnis, “Anthropologizing Alisoun: the Case of Chaucer's Wife of Bath,” *REAL* 12 (1996):203-221. Whilst the Pardoner's assertion that he preaches “*lyk a clerk*” [*CT.*, VI (C), l.391] does not explicitly deny his clerical status, it surely implies that he is at least aware of an inherent element of pretence in his role. The questionability of the Pardoner's self-authorisation as a preacher against the background of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century scholastic debate on the office of preacher is discussed in Minnis, “Chaucer's

Friar Huberd, himself no stranger to eloquent preaching, although harbouring a grudge against the Summoner since before the Wife's antifraternel aside,⁶¹ first feels impelled to silence the Wife as a matter of urgency:

"Dame," quod he, "God yeve yow right good lyf!
Ye han heer touched, also moot I thee,
In scole-matere greet difficultee.
Ye han seyde muche thyng right wel, I seye;
But, dame, heere as we ryde by the weye,
Us nedeth nat to speken but of game,
And lete auctoritees, on Goddes name,
To prechyng and to scoles of clergie.
But if it lyke to this compaignye,
I wol yow of a somonour telle a game."⁶²

The opening of the Friar's interjection recalls that of the Pardoner, but whereas the Pardoner had recognised and encouraged his professional equal, the Friar recognises a skilled potential rival. The Wife's erudition is acknowledged, but deemed inappropriate, as such topics should be left to "prechyng and to scoles of clergie;" effectively, self-proclaimed "maisters" such as the Friar himself.⁶³ Indeed, in spite of his expressed views upon the inappropriateness of preaching in the current circumstances, he soon adopts the role of the preacher himself at the close of his *Tale*.⁶⁴ In drawing an explicit moral, with recourse to appropriate biblical quotation,⁶⁵ the conclusion of the *Tale* is transformed into the "knitting

Pardoner and the 'Office of Preacher,'" pp.88-119.

⁶¹ *CT.*, III (D), ll.864-881.

⁶² *Ibid.*, III (D), ll.1270-1279.

⁶³ Whilst Friar Huberd may indeed be a Master (or even Doctor) of Theology, in the *General Prologue*, he is said to be "lyk a maister or a pope," with "lyk" suggesting inappropriate pretensions: *Ibid.*, I (A), l.261. Such self-aggrandizement was a traditional charge levelled against friars, dating back to the writings of William of St. Amour, whose antifraternel polemic appropriated Christ's rebuke to the Pharisees, "Neither be ye called masters, for one is your Master, even Christ" (Matt. 23.10): see Szittyá, *Antifraternel Tradition*, pp.32-34. Chaucer's description of Friar Huberd as being "lyk a maister or a pope" surely alludes to this tradition, whilst the Summoner's friar refers directly to the same charges in his show of mock humility before the Lord: *CT.*, I (A), l.261 & III (D), ll.2184-2188. This criticism was taken up by Lollard writers, and may be found, as we have seen above (p.114), in *Crede*, l.498.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, III (D), ll.1645-1664.

⁶⁵ The quotation, "The leoun sit in his awayt alway / To sle the innocent, if that he may" [*Ibid.*, III (D), ll.1657-1658] is taken from Psalm 10.

up” of a sermon. Tellingly, the Friar leaves no room for a response to his admonishment of the Wife, both changing the subject and broadening his address, with the conjunction “but” emphatically closing the door on any interruption before he turns his invective towards the Summoner, who must at this point seem like an easy target.

The enmity between the Friar and the Summoner has long been considered to reflect the long-standing enmity between the mendicants and the possessioners. Whilst this may well be a contributing factor, the Summoner, as an unordained agent of the Church, is surely not the most suitable pilgrim available with which to dramatise this conflict. After all, the Friar follows the worldly Monk in the *General Prologue*, whilst the Friar's antipathy towards the Parson is suggested in the assertion that:

he hadde power of confessioun,
As seyde hymself, moore than a curat.⁶⁶

Either the Monk or the Parson, therefore, would be more apposite if the secular/mendicant conflict had been Chaucer's prime concern. Szittyá has suggested a more personal basis within the poem for this antagonism, identifying the “saucfleem” Summoner as one of the “lazers” to which the Friar takes such exception.⁶⁷ Yet this still does not illuminate the dramatic purpose of the quarrel within the framework of the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole.

If the Friar, the institutionally sanctioned preacher, were merely to silence the threatening lay - not to mention female - voice of the Wife of Bath, the debate would end in an emphatic statement of the hierarchical *status quo*, as defined by the Church. Chaucer, however, sees that this is not the whole story: the Wife may be silenced to the Friar's satisfaction, but his status is far from secure. In this context, the most effective challenger to the Friar's position is the Summoner, the comically unlearned layman who is, nonetheless,

⁶⁶ *CT.*, I (A), ll.218-219.

⁶⁷ Szittyá, “Green Yeoman as Loathly Lady,” p.387.

in the employ of the Church. That he is a representative agent of the secular clergy, of course, buttresses the animosity, whilst at the same time giving scope for a broad anticlerical range across the tales that they tell. Furthermore, the creation of this animosity has the additional advantage of circumventing the need for Chaucer to take sides in any mendicant/secular conflict.

It will be useful at this juncture to summarise briefly the relationships of the pilgrims whom I have been discussing in fragment III. The Wife of Bath, a laywoman who takes it upon herself to adopt clerical discourse, is recognised as a professional equal by the Pardoner, whose authority is questionable - a situation about which he is aware, yet apparently unconcerned. Both are prepared to reveal themselves, confident of their own abilities, to their audience. The Friar, unquestionably the highest ranking of the four within the accepted hierarchy of the Church, is undermined by the Summoner, who chooses to ignore his low status and attempt to hide his ignorance behind a few Latin phrases. Neither the Friar nor the Summoner will reveal themselves, instead using their respective tales to expose each other. Between these two pairings, the Friar manages to silence the Wife of Bath; an act which is forced by the realisation that she, independent of ecclesiastical control, poses the real threat to his position. Finally, in order to cement the unity of the group, the friendship of the Summoner and the Pardoner, joining together in song, is perhaps the most graphic pairing of pilgrims in the *General Prologue*.⁶⁸ Coming in the wake of the silencing of the ideal Parson, fragment III dramatically enacts the worldly, somewhat less than ideal contest over authority between an obviously educated laity and the clergy, with those of ambiguous status in between effectively confounding any possible illusion that the issues are in any way clear cut.

In terms of interaction between the pilgrims, fragment III is surely the most lively

⁶⁸ CT., I (A), ll.669-674.

section of the entire work, constructed as it is upon a framework of interruption, discussion and altercation, so it is all the more striking that the fragment ends with the Summoner's plain statement, "my tale is doon; we been almoost at towne."⁶⁹ With this phrase, the Summoner formally declares that he has had his say. Unlike the Friar's pre-empting of any retaliation from the Wife, the Summoner actually leaves a space; "we been *almoost* at towne" suggests that there is an opportunity for further discussion before the significant moment of arrival.⁷⁰ There is, however, no further discussion and no resolution within this possible space, for each pilgrim has said his or her piece, upon which he or she remains intractable. Indeed, it may be argued that the *Summoner's Tale*, in reducing the Friar's eloquence to the level of a reverberating fart, effectively negates not only the possibility of an effective counter-riposte by Friar Huberd, but also the possibility of any further debate whatsoever. A stalemate has been reached, in which there can be no winners, only an acknowledgement of the ongoing competition.⁷¹

There is, of course, one speaker within the fragment yet to be considered; the Host. Although defined as the "governour" of the contest,⁷² the authoritative arbiter of the company by common consent, his authority is usurped by a succession of pilgrims within the fragment, with occasional attempts to reassert the *status quo* proving futile. The dramatic quality of the exchanges within this contest is unparalleled elsewhere within the *Canterbury Tales*, thus emphasising the underlying threat of disorder inherent in a debate which pierces

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, III (D), l.2294.

⁷⁰ My italics. This may be contrasted with the Parson's prologue, in which the company's "entryng *at a thropes ende*" is expressed as the defining moment for the Host's introduction to the final tale: *Ibid.*, X (I), l.12.

⁷¹ For the contrary argument that there is indeed a winner in the Friar/Summoner conflict, see Paul N. Zietlow, "In Defence of the Summoner," *ChR* 1 (1966): 4-19. Zietlow provides a good summary of arguments which suggest that the Friar wins the contest, whilst putting forward his own contention that it is the Summoner who is in fact the victor.

⁷² *CT.*, I (A), l.813.

to the root of the social order. We have seen above that prior to this fragment the Parson's right to preach is undermined, but it is worth turning once again to note precisely how this occurs:

“Now! goode men,” quod oure Hoste, “herkeneth me;
Abydeth, for Goddes digne passioun,
For we schal han a predicacioun;
This Lollere heer wil prechen us somewhat.”
“Nay, by my fader soule, that schal he nat!”⁷³

Whilst it could be argued that the Host's governance had been lost as early as the Miller's prologue, he had at least retained a pretence of order, however unconvincing it may have been. Although having little choice but to order the Miller to “Tel on, a devel wey!,”⁷⁴ this nonetheless provides an illusory semblance of the contest proceeding at the Host's behest. However, the interruption which forestalls the Parson also completely undermines the Host's authority, which he fails to regain throughout the fragment, in spite of making a spirited attempt to check the unruliness which follows the Wife's prologue:

Oure Hooste cride “Pees! and that anon!”
And seyde, “Lat the womman telle hire tale.
Ye fare as folk that dronken ben of ale.
Do, dame, telle forth youre tale, and that is best.”⁷⁵

Her assent momentarily appears to return the power of governance to the Host, but this balance of power is almost immediately readjusted as the Wife continues:

“Al redy, sire,” quod she, “right as yow lest,
If I have licence of this worthy Frere.”
“Yis, dame,” quod he, “tel forth, and I wol heere.”⁷⁶

⁷³ *Ibid.*, II (B¹), ll.1174-1178.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, I (A), l.3134.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, III (D), ll.850-853.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, III (D), ll.854-856. We may note here the Wife's use of the loaded term “licence.” As Minnis has noted, in scholastic debates concerning the authority and authorisation of preaching, “a firm distinction was made between those who teach by virtue of their public office and those who, lacking such an office, have to be specially licensed to do so.” Minnis, “Chaucer's Pardoner and the ‘Office of Preacher,’” p.89. The Wife not only draws attention to the fact that the Friar's status is only held through special commission, but also raises the implicit question which permeates fragment III: who may legitimately preach?

The contest has outgrown the constraints of the Host's plan, and it is up to the protagonists to regulate their own dispute. In spite of occasional attempts to reassert his authority,⁷⁷ the Host is reduced to a parity of status with the other disputants, and is indeed relegated to a marginal role within the drama, his interruptions serving merely to demonstrate his loss of control.

Oure Hoost answerde, "Pees, namoore of this!"
And after this he seyde unto the Frere,
"Tel forth youre tale, leeve maister deere."⁷⁸

By the time of the outburst which occurs between the *Wife of Bath's Tale* and the *Friar's Tale*, the Host appears to have grudgingly accepted his subsidiary role. Although the use of the term "maister" may well allude to traditional antifraternial criticisms,⁷⁹ its application here is weakened by the enforced deference of the Host. We may assume that the Friar, acutely perceptive and responsive to both the Wife and the Summoner, would detect any satirical implications in the Host's references to his status. Nevertheless, if a rebuke is registered, the Friar deems it to be unworthy of response: the contest for authority is more important and far-reaching than the temporary contingencies of the game. The marginalisation of the Host throughout the remainder of the fragment serves to reinforce the complete detachment from outside authority of the issue being debated - the irreconcilable issue of authority itself. It is only when the subject becomes limited to manageable proportions, as the Clerk picks up on the specific theme of marriage from the Wife of Bath,⁸⁰ that the Host is able to reassert his control.

⁷⁷ *CT.*, III (D), ll.1334-1337 & 1762-1763.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, III (D), ll.1298-1300.

⁷⁹ The term is repeated by the Host in *ibid.*, III (D), l.1337. On the antifraternial significance of the term "maister," see n.63 above.

⁸⁰ We should, however, note that the Clerk closes his tale by stating categorically that it is not concerned with marriage, but is effectively an exemplar of perfect Christian patience, before making an arch reference to the "heigh maistrie" of the Wife of Bath: *CT.*, IV (E), ll.1142-1172. In this light, the Host's insistence upon responding to the *Clerk's Tale* purely in terms of marriage, therefore, may be interpreted not as a lack of

The anticlerical elements within the fragment and, indeed, within the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole, are pervasive. Furthermore, few, if any, of these elements may not be found in earlier works.⁸¹ What is of prime importance when considering Chaucer's adoption of anticlerical traditions, however, is Chaucer himself. Whereas Langland's work had been intended for the reform of the Church from within, but had been appropriated by a lay audience, Chaucer was a layman who, in turn, was intentionally writing for an essentially lay audience. Consequently, anticlerical commonplaces in the *Canterbury Tales* acquire an entirely new complexion.

Scase has commented that at the close of *Piers Plowman*, "the new anticlerical author remained uncreated," and poses the question: "what kind of writer had usurped the clergy's literal lordship?"⁸² The answer is surely a writer, such as Chaucer, who stands outside the prescribed arena of anticlerical debate, and who adopts traditional satirical discourse in order to comment upon the institution as a whole in relation to all areas of society. Fragment III of the *Canterbury Tales* effectively enacts this broadening of the arena, in which the Wife of Bath's method of citing experience as authority in some ways reflects Chaucer's method: Chaucer the pilgrim is, after all, telling his audience of his experiences amongst the company. But does this mean that Chaucer the poet is himself challenging the authority of the Church?

Early this century, Tupper claimed that

He who denies that Chaucer does preach and with a definite purpose must either close his eyes to the many obvious "moralities" in the several tales, or else eyeing

perception, but as an assertive act of closure which prevents the destabilising topic of authority from raising its head once more.

⁸¹ Indeed, it was long ago noted that "Chaucer's ecclesiastical portrait-gallery in the *Canterbury Tales* has marked resemblances to the religious rogues in Langland:" Coghill, "Two Notes," p.90. This point has subsequently been made more extensively in Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, especially pp.208-212.

⁸² Scase, *Piers Plowman and the New Anticlericalism*, p.173.

them askance must proclaim, as has been often done, their utter aimlessness and irrelevancy. That the “moralities” are there, he who runs may read. That they are “moralities” of the Sins, no one can doubt who takes the trouble to compare them with Chaucer’s own description of the vices (*Parson’s Tale*) or with the traditional traits of these evil passions in medieval theology.⁸³

Whilst the hypothesis that the *Tales* provide explorations of the Seven Deadly Sins, which are finally brought together in the all-encompassing *Parson’s Tale*, ultimately relies upon a particularly selective approach to the textual evidence, the fact that Chaucer, within his tales, does indeed preach is undeniable. The debt to sermon literature and to *Piers Plowman* has already been noted above, but the “definite purpose” remains elusive.

It is perhaps tempting, particularly in view of Chaucer’s known association with the so-called “Lollard Knights,”⁸⁴ to join with the Host and “smelle a lollere in the wynd.”⁸⁵ Certainly, Tupper is not the only critic to have found the religious “sentence” of the *Canterbury Tales* to be the unifying principle,⁸⁶ but even if this were the case - and I shall argue that this view, whilst tenable, is an over-simplification - it is surely significant that the “myrie tale in prose,”⁸⁷ with which the work closes on a devotionally didactic note, is placed in the mouth not of his Langlandian Ploughman, but of his brother, the ideal Parson.⁸⁸ For all the anticlericalism throughout the Tales, and for all the clamour of raised lay and clerical voices “preaching” against each other, the last word is given to the ideal representative of the clergy amongst the company, whose preaching is officially sanctioned.

⁸³ Frederick Tupper, “Chaucer and the Seven Deadly Sins,” *PMLA* 29 (1914): 126.

⁸⁴ McFarlane, *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights*, pp.180 & 182-185.

⁸⁵ *CT.*, II (B¹), l.1173.

⁸⁶ Robertson, for example, concludes that, “so far as Chaucer is concerned, we may as well recognize the fact that he was a Christian poet,” whose “problem as an artist was to encourage (his audience’s) thirst for (God’s love):” D.W. Robertson Jr., *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1963), p.503. Baldwin likewise characterises the *Canterbury Tales* as “a fictional penitential journey.” Baldwin, “Unity of the *Canterbury Tales*,” p.108.

⁸⁷ *CT.*, X (I), l.46.

⁸⁸ I shall return to the relationship between Ploughman and Parson below, pp.146-148.

Some critics have seen in the *Parson's Tale* a contribution to the overall satiric mode of the *Canterbury Tales*,⁸⁹ but this argument rests upon the perceived “dullness” of the tale, which has been labelled “un-Chaucerian.”⁹⁰ Finlayson has suggested that

Chaucer is here employing his acknowledged art quite deliberately to create a style which is peculiarly appropriate to the Parson...The Parson as ideal is full of good sentence, but the Parson as a representative type is also rather pedantic, more concerned to propound his dogma than vivify it, and hence not infrequently tedious.⁹¹

Whilst the appropriateness of tale to teller is indeed accomplished with customary skill, it would appear somewhat uncharacteristic of Chaucer's “acknowledged art” if we were to believe that such a lengthy tale were intentionally dull. After all, the Host's rude interruption of the tale of *Sir Thopas* clearly shows that Chaucer, when he so desired, could convey tedium in much less space and, furthermore, do so in an amusing fashion. The Parson, however, receives no such censure, although a comparison with this early example of the Host's impatience with *Sir Thopas* will serve to illuminate our perception of the *Parson's Tale*.

When censured by the Host, Chaucer offers an alternative:

I wol yow telle a litel thyng in prose
That oghte liken yow, as I suppose,
Or elles, certes, ye ben to daungerous.
It is a moral tale vertuouse
Al be it told somtyme in sondry wyse
Of sondry folk, as I shal yow devyse.⁹²

The prose “moral tale vertuouse” is offered as a more acceptable alternative to the “rym dogerel” of *Sir Thopas*, and we may detect strong echoes of Chaucer the pilgrim's terms

⁸⁹ Notably John Finlayson, “The Satiric Mode of the *Parson's Tale*,” *ChR* 6 (1971): 94-116.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.115. The view of the casual twentieth-century reader is perhaps most clearly articulated in the note to Wright's modern prose rendering of the *Canterbury Tales*, in which it is explained that the *Parson's Tale* (like the *Tale of Melibee*) is omitted as being “unlikely to interest the general reader.” Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, modernised by David Wright (St. Albans, 1965), p.314.

⁹¹ Finlayson, “Satiric Mode,” pp.115-116.

⁹² *CT.*, VII, ll.937-942.

when we come to the Parson's introduction to his own *Tale*. When asked by the Host for a "fable," the Parson replies:

Thou getest fable noon ytoold for me...

I wol yow telle a myrie tale in prose
To knytte up al this feeste and make an ende.⁹³

Whereas the pilgrim Chaucer abandons frivolous verse in favour of edifying prose at the behest of the sole "governour" of the game, the Host,⁹⁴ the Parson makes this choice in accordance with the will of the divine "governour," "oure sweete Lord God of hevene,"⁹⁵ who is invoked in the first prose line of his *Tale*. The game is ended, and competition, whether in terms of the story contest or personal rivalries, is transcended as the company, as one, submit to the words of the Parson:

Oure Hoost hadde the wordes for us alle;
"Sire preest," quod he, "now faire yow bifalle!
Telleth," quod he, "youre meditacioun.
But hasten yow; the sonne wole adoun;
Beth fructuous, and that in litel space,
And to do wel God sende yow his grace!
Sey what yow list, and we wol gladly heere."⁹⁶

The assembled company clearly do not invest the prospect with the dullness often ascribed to it by modern critics, and manuscript survivals of individual *Tales* suggests that Chaucer's audience, like that of his Parson, responded positively to the *Parson's Tale*.⁹⁷ Indeed, the company desires to hear the most edifying tale that he may provide, as the Host abandons his casually blasphemous oaths and prays that God will grant grace for the Parson to preach

⁹³ *Ibid.*, X (I), ll.31 & 46-47. In employing the term "fable," Chaucer appears to be employing Isidore of Seville's black and white distinction between *historia* (fact) and *fabula* (fiction), the former being endowed with moral superiority. See Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: Grammatica and Literary Theory, 350-1100* (Cambridge, 1994), pp.234-241.

⁹⁴ *CT.*, I (A), l.813.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, X (I), l.75.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, X (I), ll.67-74.

⁹⁷ See Paul Strohm, "Chaucer's Fifteenth-Century Audience and the narrowing of the 'Chaucer Tradition,'" *SAC* 4 (1982): 24-25.

effectively or, as he expresses it, to “do wel.”

It is possible, in this exhortation to “do wel,” to catch a final echo of *Piers Plowman* in the *Canterbury Tales*, and it is an echo of which Langland himself would surely have approved. Whereas John Ball's letter to the Essex commons had called upon labourers, including “Peres the Ploughman,” to “do wel and bettre” in the rebels’ cause,⁹⁸ Chaucer’s Host’s use of the phrase carries the implicit orthodoxy of Langland:

Whoso is trewe of his tunge and of his two handes,
And thorough his labour or thorough his land his liflode wynneth,
And is trusty of his tailende, taketh but his owene,
And is noght dronkelewe ne dedeynous - Dowel hym folweth.⁹⁹

This, Langland's first definition of Dowel, is perfectly in keeping with Chaucer’s ideal brothers, the Parson and the Ploughman. Yet it is the Parson alone who is called upon to “do wel” in enacting his ordained duty of preaching.

In allocating the Parson to “knytte up” the collection, the close of the *Canterbury Tales* undoubtedly takes on a different complexion. Baldwin has noted the significance of the transfer of authority from the Host to the Parson, “the one a guide in the ways of the world, the other a guide in the spiritual way.”¹⁰⁰ Indeed, in the Parson’s expressed intention of showing the way “in this viage,”

Of thilke parfit glorious pilgrymage
That highte Jerusalem celestial,¹⁰¹

there is a suggestion that this “guide in the spiritual way” will transform the earthly pilgrimage into spiritual allegory. There is, however, insufficient evidence to suggest that the *Parson’s Tale* is intended to transform the reader’s retrospective view of the complete

⁹⁸ Dobson, *Peasants’ Revolt*, p.381.

⁹⁹ *PPL.*, B VIII ll.81-84.

¹⁰⁰ Ralph Baldwin, *The Unity of the Canterbury Tales* (Copenhagen, 1955), p.94.

¹⁰¹ *CT.*, X (I), ll.50-51.

work.¹⁰²

As early in the work as the *Knight's Tale*, Egeus, in seeking to console Theseus, reflects that

This world nys but a thurghfare ful of wo,
And we ben pilgrymes, passynge to and fro.¹⁰³

Although this alerts the reader to the possibility of an allegorical meaning for the pilgrimage,¹⁰⁴ the subsequent drama of the links between the tales pointedly locates the work within the context of an unmistakably physical pilgrimage. When the Parson defines their ultimate goal as “Jerusalem celestial,” then, he is not transforming the characters we have encountered into allegorical personifications. He is, it must be remembered, addressing these very characters and, appropriately enough as their journey draws to a close, reminding them of the reason for their pilgrimage: it is for the good of their souls. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, the act of pilgrimage was considered by many fourteenth-century commentators to have become debased, so we may see in the Parson’s words an attempt to re-assert the devotional aspect and elevate “St. Truth” to a parity with St. Thomas of Canterbury in the minds of his listeners.

Whilst it is, with the hindsight provided by the encyclopaedic *Parson's Tale*, possible to discern elements of the Seven Deadly Sins in the preceding tales, to do so is perhaps to see only half of the picture. Taylor has perceptively noted of the Parson’s enumeration of, and exposition upon, the sins that

On the whole there is no apparent intent to apply these moral comments to either

¹⁰² The idea of the *Parson's Tale* as a “key” to the meaning of the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole is central to readings of the work as a penitential allegory. For a cogent summary of the theories propounded for the position and significance of the *Parson's Tale*, see David Lawton, “Chaucer’s Two Ways: The Pilgrimage Frame of *The Canterbury Tales*,” *SAC* 9 (1987): 4-13.

¹⁰³ *CT.*, I (A), ll.2847-2848.

¹⁰⁴ This point is noted in Cooper, *Structure of the Canterbury Tales*, p.65.

the pilgrims or their tales.¹⁰⁵

As we have seen, penitential texts were, of necessity, all-embracing.¹⁰⁶ The *Parson's Tale*, therefore, is not aimed at highlighting the sins of individuals, but to unite these individuals within "the compaignye and comunyoun of hooly chirche" and, ultimately, "the blisful compaignye that rejoysen hem everemo" in heaven.¹⁰⁷ Although acknowledging the faults and divisions within the contemporary Church as enacted throughout the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer, by means of the unifying nature of the *Parson's Tale*, negates possible charges of heterodoxy by emphasising the supremacy of the Christian ideal as professed by the ideal cleric.¹⁰⁸

In the context of such a conclusion, it is perhaps puzzling that Chaucer chooses not to re-introduce the Ploughman, in order to illustrate the ideal for the laity within this all-encompassing Christian community. Chaucer's perceptive reading of Langland has been alluded to throughout the present chapter, and the similarities between his Ploughman and Langland's Piers make it all the more remarkable that the figure is not employed, as in *Piers Plowman*, to embody the ideal Christian life. Whilst it is possible, and indeed convenient, to cite the incomplete nature of the *Canterbury Tales* to explain the absence of a *Ploughman's Tale*, I would suggest that this omission is quite deliberate.

The Ploughman has fared no better in the esteem of modern readers than his brother, and Lawton merely voices an extreme expression of a widely-held view in stating that

¹⁰⁵ Paul Beekman Taylor, "The Parson's Amyable Tongue," *ES* 64 (1983): 404.

¹⁰⁶ See chapter Two above.

¹⁰⁷ *CT.*, X (I), 1.312 & 1077. The issue of Christian community in the Parson's Tale is explored at length in Lawler, *The One and the Many*, pp.147-170.

¹⁰⁸ Knapp has pointed out that "the considerable area of overlap between orthodox and Wycliffite discourse on many ethical matters is demonstrated by such treatises (as the *Parson's Tale*):" Knapp, *Social Contest*, p.92. The accuracy of this observation renders Chaucer's allocation of this Tale to his only ideal cleric all the more significant.

we would have to read a lot of bad literature to meet a walk-on part quite as tedious as Chaucer's plowman.¹⁰⁹

In comparing the brothers, Bowden favours the Parson, observing that the Ploughman

has not quite the warm vitality of the Parson, whose light seems to shine in the real world, illuminating the way for all who observe his glowing virtue and good works.¹¹⁰

This observation touches upon the reason why it is difficult to respond with equal warmth to the Ploughman as to the other pilgrims: he is, in effect, too much of an ideal, appearing merely as a synopsis of his brother's many qualities, as the Parson's good works are reduced to the catch-all phrase "parfit charitee."¹¹¹

A reader with some knowledge of *Piers Plowman*,¹¹² upon encountering this ideal ploughman who reflects the virtues of the Parson may, like the narrator of *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*, exclaim "A Peres!" in recognition.¹¹³ However, Chaucer chooses neither to confirm this association by naming his Ploughman nor to place the didactic tale which we may expect in his mouth: this explicit linking of Chaucer's Ploughman with Piers is left for later interpolators, as we shall see.¹¹⁴ The reason for this may most readily be surmised as an understandable reluctance on the part of Chaucer to associate his own appropriation of Piers with those of political or religious dissenters.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Lawton, "English Poetry and English Society," p.157.

¹¹⁰ Muriel Bowden, *A Commentary on the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* (New York, 1957), p.242.

¹¹¹ *CT.*, I (A), l.532.

¹¹² As noted above (pp.51-52,93), one need not necessarily have read *Piers Plowman* in order to have some knowledge of the work.

¹¹³ *Crede*, l.474.

¹¹⁴ The spurious *Plowman's Tale* which was later added to *The Canterbury Tales* will be discussed in chapter Six.

¹¹⁵ Although no Lollard texts referring to *Piers Plowman* may be dated this early, Wyclif's teachings had been condemned at the Blackfriars Council of 1382, and there is no reason to suppose that Lollard readings were not already current. Indeed, such readings are suggested by Langland's own process of revision (see chapter Six below).

In spite of this expedient suppression of the Ploughman, however, the inclusion of this recognisable figure in brotherhood with the Parson creates resonances which may be felt throughout the work. Agricultural imagery recurs throughout the *Canterbury Tales*, beginning with the very first sentence of the *General Prologue*. As Benson has pointed out, a dry March, whilst by no means typical of English weather, was considered by farmers to be propitious to sowing, promising a good crop.¹¹⁶ That this setting is invoked with an awareness of its agricultural implications, indicating to pilgrims and readers alike that circumstances favour a good crop of tales, is supported by the Knight's apologetic commencement to the first *Tale* proper:

I have, God woot, a large feeld to ere,
And wayke been the oxen in my plough.¹¹⁷

In this way, Chaucer firmly identifies ploughing as a metaphor for tale-telling,¹¹⁸ thereby implicitly identifying himself with the Ploughman, as a "trewe swynkere" at his craft.¹¹⁹

Consequently, when the Parson introduces his *Tale* by asking the rhetorical question:

Why sholde I sowen draf out of my fest,
Whan I may sowen whete, if that me lest?¹²⁰

he is preparing to "sow" upon ground which has been "ploughed" by Chaucer in the various guises of his pilgrims. The poet is effectively assuming the identity of the Parson's brother,

¹¹⁶ *Riverside Chaucer*, p.799. On the possible sources for the images of natural fecundity which open the *Canterbury Tales*, see Ordelle G. Hill, *The Manor, the Plowman, and the Shepherd: Agrarian Themes and Imagery in Late Medieval and Early Renaissance English Literature* (London, 1993), pp.80-84.

¹¹⁷ *CT.*, I (A), ll.886-887.

¹¹⁸ The reader is reminded of a similar use of the metaphor in *Parliament of Fowls*, ll.22-25: "For out of olde felde, as men seyth, / Cometh al this newe corn from yer to yere, / And out of olde bokes, in good feyth, / Cometh al this newe science that men lere." Chaucer also employs the metaphor of words as corn in *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, l.3443; *The House of Fame*, l.2140; *The Legend of Good Women*, Prologue F., ll.73-77 and Prologue G., ll. 61-65.

¹¹⁹ *CT.*, I (A), l.531. I have examined the relationship between Chaucer and his exemplary figures of the Parson and Ploughman at greater length elsewhere. See Paul Hardwick, "Ploughmen, Poets and Preachers" (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of York, 1993), pp.22-37.

¹²⁰ *CT.*, X (I), ll.35-36.

whilst at the same time, like the Ploughman, maintaining a subservient role. In so doing, Chaucer, whilst not devaluing the body of the *Canterbury Tales*, attributes the greatest value to the Parson's "knitting up:" the Ploughman tradition is invoked only to re-assert finally the supremacy of the Church. Chaucer is, in effect, passing judgment upon the debate enacted in fragment III, silencing the raised lay voice, exemplified by the "*Piers Plowman* tradition," in deference to the orthodox voice of the Parson.¹²¹

Braswell has claimed that "the most memorable characters in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* are without doubt the sinners,"¹²² but by its very position and size it is perhaps the *Parson's Tale*, along with Chaucer's *Retraction* which seamlessly follows, which leaves the greatest impression.¹²³ In particular, it is the *Retraction*, in which Chaucer apparently dismisses much of his life's work, which lingers to perplex the reader.

Mehl has characterised the *Retraction* as

not so much a sweeping rejection of his literary achievement, as a last earnest appeal to the reader against any possible misreading or undesirable influence of his poetry.¹²⁴

Ultimately, states Chaucer, "al that is writen is writen for oure doctrine,"¹²⁵ even the frivolous "enditynges of worldly vanitees."¹²⁶ This quote from St. Paul has appeared before,

¹²¹ Strohm has contended that, due to its incomplete nature, the *Canterbury Tales* "resists closure, denying to any one pilgrim the finality of utterance to which the voice of the Parson would aspire:" Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, p.180. Whilst, as he goes on to note, subsequent re-ordering of fragments - and, indeed, the addition of apocryphal tales - would appear to support this view, we should not lose sight of the fact that Chaucer, although leaving his work unfinished, *did* supply an authorial ending in the *Parson's Tale* and *Retraction*, and there is no reason to suppose that any further work upon the *Tales* as a whole would have affected this final "knitting up."

¹²² Mary Flowers Braswell, *The Medieval Sinner* (London, 1983), p.101.

¹²³ Manuscript studies suggest that the "moral" tales, such as the *Prioress' Tale* and *Melibee* as well as the *Parson's Tale*, were amongst the most independently popular *Canterbury Tales* in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: Strohm, "Chaucer's Fifteenth-Century Audience," pp.24-25.

¹²⁴ Dieter Mehl, "Chaucer's Audience," *LSE n.s.* 10 (1978): 59.

¹²⁵ *CT.*, X (I), 1.1083.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, X (I), 1.1085.

at the close of the *Nun's Priest's Tale*,¹²⁷ where the bemused reader of this most fabulous of the Canterbury narratives is left to fend for him or herself when trying to sort the “fruyt” from the “chaf.”¹²⁸ In this final invocation from the pen of a lay poet, following the avowedly fable- and chaff-free *Parson's Tale*, the quote serves finally to define Chaucer's conception of his role as that of a “trewe swynkere,” working “for Cristes sake, for every povre wight,”¹²⁹ in accordance with the exemplary model provided by the Church.

Yet, in retaining the medium of prose for his *Retraction*, Chaucer explicitly cements the relationship between himself and the Parson. Indeed, without rubrication, the reference to “this litel tretys” in the first line could easily be in the Parson's voice.¹³⁰ It is only when Chaucer's specific works are enumerated that the reader realises that this is the voice of the poet, so completely has he subsumed himself within the discourse of the Parson.¹³¹ The role of the poet has effectively been abandoned for the Parson's prose, the works of the individual have been given up to higher judgment and, with the closing liturgical formula, “*Qui cum Patre et Spiritu Sancto vivit et regnat Deus per omnia secula. Amen*,”¹³² the subservience of the writer and his works to the higher authority of the Church is sealed, as the vernacular work is closed in the institutionally more authoritative Latin.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, VII, ll.3441-3442.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, VII, l.3443. It has been suggested that the unifying theme of fragment VII of the *Canterbury Tales* is literature itself: Alan T. Gaylord, “Sentence and Solaas in Fragment VII of the *Canterbury Tales*: Harry Bailey as Horseback Editor,” *PMLA* 82 (1967): 226-235. See also, Cooper, *Structure of the Canterbury Tales*, pp.161-188. In this case, the lack of a clear moral at the end of the virtuoso *Nun's Priest's Tale* which closes the fragment may be seen as an expression of the ultimate failure of literature to provide the *sentence* which is gained when *fable* is finally abandoned at the close of the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole.

¹²⁹ *CT.*, I (A), l.537.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, X (I), l.1081.

¹³¹ A clue, however, is perhaps offered by the expression “litel tretys” itself, which has previously been employed in the introduction to *The Tale of Melibee* which Chaucer, within the narrative framework of the *Tales*, chooses to ascribe to himself: *ibid.*, VII, l.957.

¹³² *Ibid.*, X (I), l.1092.

The poet's presentation of himself as he takes leave of his audience is as one sinner in the company who has been touched by the Parson's call to penance, the *Retraction* being a staged show of humility.¹³³ More than this, however, after implicitly equating story-teller and ploughman, this humble retraction is a necessary device by which Chaucer may distance himself from contemporary dissenting readings of Langland, with which he was surely familiar.

As has been noted above, the way in which Chaucer makes subtle use of *Piers Plowman* in order to show his support for the *status quo* would no doubt have been approved of by Langland. Nonetheless, we must not overlook the fact that clerical authority is here being stressed by consent of a layman;¹³⁴ and as Chaucer so dramatically demonstrates in fragment III of the *Canterbury Tales*, once the laity are able to enter into the debate over their place in the spiritual hierarchy, that hierarchy of necessity becomes unstable. For all Chaucer's orthodoxy, the simple fact of his addressing this institutional instability in a form accessible to the laity is in itself threatening to the *status quo*.

In the next chapter, we shall cast our nets wider and consider a number of works of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries which bear the impression not only of *Piers Plowman*, but also of *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* and the *Canterbury Tales*. In so doing, I hope to demonstrate the extent of what Bishop Reginald Pecock would term the "unruliness" of

¹³³ For an opposing view, that Chaucer utilizes traditional motifs in his *Retraction* in order to make known his collected works, see Olive Sayce, "Chaucer's 'Retractions': the Conclusion of the *Canterbury Tales* and its Place in Literary Tradition," *MAE* 40 (1971): 230-248. For an overview of critical opinion on the status and function of the *Retraction*, see James D. Gordon, "Chaucer's Retraction: a Review of Opinion," in *Studies in Medieval Literature in Honour of A.C. Baugh*, ed. M.E. Leach (Philadelphia, 1961), pp.81-96; Douglas Wurtele, "The Penitence of Geoffrey Chaucer," *Viator* 11 (1980): 335-359.

¹³⁴ One is reminded of the late fourteenth-century preacher who pointedly begins his sermon with "haly wryte" because he has been "blamyd" by his congregation for failing to employ the correct "auctoritee" on a previous occasion: it is very much a case of clerical authority by lay consent. See pp.27-28 above.

the English vernacular,¹³⁵ and to show the extent to which the orthodox reformism of Langland's *Piers Plowman* became, merely through its transgression into the lay domain by means of being written in the vernacular, an anticlerical tradition in itself.

¹³⁵ Reginald Pecock, *Book of Faith*, ed. J.L. Morison (Glasgow, 1909), p.251. Pecock himself will be considered in detail in chapter Seven.

CHAPTER 6

THE “*PIERS PLOWMAN* TRADITION” AND THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF VERNACULAR ANTICLERICALISM

In the last two chapters, I have focused upon the influence of *Piers Plowman* upon two very different works; the anonymous *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Although markedly different in themselves, both works reflect readings of *Piers Plowman* which are centred outside the reading community for which it was originally intended, and we have seen that, freed from the interpretative restrictions of a purely orthodox clerical audience, the work became a malleable tool in the hands of the *Crede* poet and Chaucer.¹ By responding to *Piers Plowman* self-consciously within a cultural context in which lay articulation of anticlerical concepts was increasingly policed by the Church, both of these poets may be seen to have been writing within, as well as contributing to, an emerging discourse of vernacular anticlericalism, the parameters of which had not yet been defined. We may indeed borrow Foucault's analysis of a different, yet analogous, phenomenon, and say that although the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries were “an age of increased repression,” this paradoxically generated

more centres of power...more attention manifested and verbalized...more circular contacts and linkages...more sites where the persistency of power catches hold, only to spread elsewhere.²

We have seen in chapter Five how Chaucer succeeded in dramatising, and commenting upon, the contest between these “centres of power” in his *Canterbury Tales*, by subtly alluding to the anticlerical currency acquired by *Piers Plowman*. It is the purpose of the

¹ *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* contains no clues as to the status, whether lay or clerical, of its author. Although it is quite possible, even likely, that such a skilled poet was himself a cleric, his heterodox appropriation of *Piers Plowman* was undoubtedly aimed at an audience which included members of the laity.

² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* vol.1, trans. Robert Hurley (reprint, London, 1981), p.49.

present chapter to explore some of these “contacts and linkages” as they are manifested across a range of works from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, by continuing to trace the establishment of Piers the ploughman as a potent element of vernacular anticlerical discourse. In so doing, I hope to demonstrate more fully the extent to which clerical discourse unavoidably became, as it were, anticlerical discourse once it had moved into the realm of the vernacular.

At the close of *Piers Plowman*, Conscience, in the aftermath of the fall of the Barn of Unity, finally realises that the only hope for reform is “to seken Piers the Plowman.”³ In this final revelation, it is shown that it is not enough merely to be guided by that which is embodied in Piers, as Will has throughout the work; one must “have” him.⁴ Whilst this discovery of the path to Grace provides a fitting climax to Will’s allegorical quest, it leaves the work, on a more prosaic level, unfinished: Piers is yet to be found.

Bloom has suggested that

a poet interpreting his precursor...must *falsify* by his reading. Though this falsification can be quite genuinely perverse or even ill-willed, it need not be, and usually it is not. But it must be a falsification, because every strong reading insists that the meaning it finds is exclusive and accurate.⁵

More simply, perhaps, this view of the relationship of a given text to its predecessor might be expressed as:

Saepius quod bene dictur, non bene intelligitur.⁶

[Frequently that which is well said is not well understood.]

This maxim of Hugh of St. Victor, cited by Arundel in his *Constitutions* of 1409, provides

³ *PPL.*, B XX l.381.

⁴ *Ibid.*, B XX l.386.

⁵ Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford, 1975), p.69.

⁶ *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae* volume 3, p.317.

an apposite gloss upon the works of the “*Piers Plowman* tradition,” and it is perhaps the literal incompleteness of *Piers Plowman* which allows such scope for misunderstanding, both unwitting and “perverse.” In the same way, the incompleteness of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* allowed free rein for continuators wishing to complete the journey to Canterbury or fill in missing stories by the way, whether motivated by artistic or political/religious concerns.

Bowers has noted that many of these later additions to the *Canterbury Tales* may be traced to Benedictine monks, and has suggested that in considering these monastic continuations to “courtly” poetry,

we are perhaps witnessing in these texts the solidarity between the ancient institutions of monarchy and monasticism to safeguard the *status quo*.⁷

Yet there is evidence that the establishment of Chaucer at the head of an institutionally sanctioned canon of English poetry resulted also in attempts to appropriate the “National Poet” as a spurious spokesman for dissenting ideology.⁸ Nowhere is this more apparent than in the *Plowman’s Tale*,⁹ an apocryphal continuation to the *Canterbury Tales*, which presents a rather one-sided debate between the Lollard Pellycan and the Gryffon, who barely succeeds in getting a word in edge-ways on behalf of the Church.

Whilst, as Skeat long ago noted, “it does not appear that the ascription of it to

⁷ John M. Bowers (ed.), *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions* (Kalamazoo, 1992), p.3. On the Chaucerian apocrypha, see also Strohm, “Chaucer’s Fifteenth-Century Audience and the Narrowing of the ‘Chaucer Tradition,’” pp.3-32; Stephan Kohl, “Chaucer’s Pilgrims in Fifteenth-Century Literature,” *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 7 (1983): 221-236.

⁸ On the development of Chaucer’s reputation, see Burrow, *Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Anthology*. For the effect of editorial biases on the way in which Chaucer’s works have been presented and received in subsequent historical periods, see Paul G. Ruggiers (ed.), *Editing Chaucer: The Great Tradition* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1984).

⁹ *The Plowman’s Tale*, in Dean, *Six Ecclesiastical Satires*, pp.58-101. Unfortunately, the first scholarly edition of both the c.1532 and 1606 editions of *The Plowman’s Tale*, ed. Mary Rhineland McCarl (Hamden, Connecticut, 1996) was not yet available at the time of writing the present thesis.

(Chaucer) was taken seriously,”¹⁰ the interpolation of the *Plowman’s Tale* into the *Canterbury Tales* has the effect of retrospectively colouring Chaucer’s anticlericalism in suspiciously Lollard hues. Before the *Tale* proper commences, there is a fifty-two line prologue, describing how the ploughman ceases work “whan mydsommer mone was comen in,”¹¹ and sets off on a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury. No sooner has he departed than he falls into company with Chaucer’s pilgrims, and after turning the invitation to introduce himself into an opportunity for some anticlerical sniping, he is addressed thus:

“What, man!” quod our Host, “canst thou preche?
Come nere, and tell us some holy thyng.”¹²

This exhortation by the Host immediately recalls the exchange which follows the Parson’s interruption at the close of fragment II of the *Canterbury Tales*:

“Now! Goode men,” quod oure Hoste, “Herkeneth me;
Abydeth, for Goddes digne passioun,
For we schal han a predicacioun;
This Lollere heer wil prechen us somewhat.”¹³

The tone, however, is markedly different. Chaucer’s Host, in commanding the company to “Herkeneth me,” self-consciously seeks to assert his role as “governour,” a role which, as we have seen, is frequently threatened with usurpation in the *Canterbury Tales*.¹⁴ At the same time the Parson is belittled with the rather scornful phrase, “this Lollere heer.” In contrast, the Host of the *Plowman’s Tale* bows to the authority of the Parson’s

¹⁰ Introduction to Skeat, *Chaucerian and Other Pieces*, pp.xxxii-xxxiii.

¹¹ *Plowman’s Tale*, l.2. Whilst this is inconsistent with Chaucer’s location of his pilgrimage in April, it does suggest a possible reference to the “somer seson” in which *Piers Plowman* commences.

¹² *Plowman’s Tale*, ll.45-46.

¹³ *CT*, II (B¹), ll.1174-1177.

¹⁴ See chapter Five. As Kohl has pointed out, the governing role of the Host is not challenged in any of the fifteenth-century continuations to the *Canterbury Tales*. See Kohl, “Chaucer’s Pilgrims in Fifteenth-Century Literature,” pp.221-236.

unequivocally Lollard brother.¹⁵ As we have seen in the previous chapter, Chaucer uses the closing exchange of fragment II in order to dramatise the disruption of established hierarchies, and to introduce the contest for authority which dominates fragment III. For the writer of the prologue to the *Plowman's Tale*, however, such contests are over, the dispute having been settled in favour of the Plowman, a lay preacher who would certainly not have been to the taste of a Host who would contemptuously declare:

What shul we speke alday of hooly writ?
The devel made a reve for to preche.¹⁶

There is no doubt that the prologue to the *Plowman's Tale* is a sixteenth-century addition to the earlier main body of the poem,¹⁷ providing

a quasi-Chaucerian framework for a piece that was certainly not originally written as a Canterbury tale. The author, doubtless, did not intend it to be regarded as a portion of Chaucer's poem; but he knew that Chaucer's band of pilgrims included a ploughman, and this suggested the idea of presenting the Lollard sermon as a "tale" told by the ploughman of the "Creed" to his companions on the Canterbury pilgrimage.¹⁸

Simply to say this, however, may be seen as marginalising the appropriateness of the tale to the teller. Apart from the prologue, Bradley also dated a lengthy interpolated passage (ll.717-1268) to the sixteenth century, citing unspecified "evidence of language" to support his case. If this were so, the pointed references to ploughmen which occur throughout this interpolation could be viewed as evidence of a concerted sixteenth-century attempt to

¹⁵ It is interesting to note, however, that whilst the Host in the *Canterbury Tales* belittles the Parson, he nonetheless employs the polite form of pronouns, thereby acknowledging the Parson's higher status. This may be contrasted with the prologue to the *Plowman's Tale*, in which the Host, although bowing to the preaching authority of the ploughman, employs the familiar form of the pronoun, indicating a parity of status which accords with the Lollard notion of the non-hierarchical community of the elect: *CT.*, II (B¹), ll.1166-1172; *Plowman's Tale*, ll.25-49.

¹⁶ *CT.*, I (A), ll.3902-3903.

¹⁷ This view, expressed by Henry Bradley, "*The Plowman's Tale*," *The Athenæum*, 12th July 1902, p.62, has not subsequently been challenged.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.62.

marshal elements of the “ploughman tradition” to the cause of Reformation propaganda.¹⁹

More recently, however, Wawn, citing both linguistic and contextual evidence, has shown that, contrary to Bradley’s long-accepted assertion, there is every reason to date the bulk of the poem as it stands to “within a generation on either side of 1400.”²⁰ It would appear, therefore, that long before the poem was opportunistically appended to the *Canterbury Tales*, it was considered appropriate to attribute a work of Lollard polemic to a ploughman.

Of the section of the poem between lines 716 and 1268, Wawn has concluded that

It is highly likely...that a debate was included in the original form of the poem. It is equally likely, however, that the debate as we now have it differs from the original one...The debate and the material relating to monks and secular canons, in the form which we now have both of them, were probably the work of another Lollard writer who came across the original poem and wished both to extend the range of the poem’s assault on the clergy and also perhaps to modify and clarify such ambiguities and infelicities of expression as may have existed in the original form of the debate.²¹

Unfortunately, we are unlikely to discover for certain if the ploughman references occurred in the original form of the poem, but their absence outside the long interpolation suggests that they were introduced in order to capitalise upon the didactic authority bestowed upon the ploughman within the “*Piers Plowman* tradition.”

Of freres I have tolde before,
In a makynge of a Crede.
And yet I coulde tell worse and more,
But men wolde weryen it to rede.²²

The somewhat inferior verse of the *Plowman’s Tale* poet makes it highly unlikely that

¹⁹ These instances will be discussed below, pp.159-160.

²⁰ Andrew N. Wawn, “The Genesis of *The Plowman’s Tale*,” *YES* 2 (1972): 29.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.39.

²² *Plowman’s Tale*, ll.1065-1068.

the same poet was in fact responsible for *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*.²³ However, the claim does have the effect not only of explicitly aligning the work with the *Crede*-poet, but also of implicitly revealing a target audience. The possibility of *Piers Plowman* being known as much by reputation as by acquaintance with the actual texts has been considered above,²⁴ but this clear reference to the *Crede* as a source for antifraternial material with which the poet would not like to risk boring his audience through repetition, suggests a work fashioned (or re-fashioned) specifically for an audience amongst which copies of the *Crede* were in circulation.²⁵

Commenting on the “pride and ease” of the monastic Orders,²⁶ the Pellycan, who acts as the mouthpiece for Lollard polemic within the poem, observes that

Had they ben out of religion,
They must have honged at the plowe,
Threshynge and dykynge fro towne to towne,
Wyth sory mete, and not halfe ynowe.²⁷

The alternative to monastic luxury is thus characterised as precisely the poor, yet blessed figure of Piers, whom the narrator sees “upon the plow hongen” in *Crede*.²⁸ The complexity of *Piers Plowman* has, as in *Crede*, been stripped to leave a black and white vision in which corrupt clerics “with true tyllers sturte and stryve.”²⁹ The Gryffon’s dismissive contention

²³ Skeat’s early conclusion that the works provide “ample confirmation, from internal evidence, that the claim is certainly true,” was later revised, and subsequent scholarship has discounted the possibility of common authorship: Skeat, *Chaucerian and Other Pieces*, p.xxxiii; Bradley, “*Plowman’s Tale*,” p.62.

²⁴ See above, pp.51-52, 93.

²⁵ On the intended audience of *Crede*, see p.115, n.159. Two manuscript copies of *Crede* survive from the sixteenth century, along with Reyner Wolfe’s printed edition of 1553 and 1561: Barr, *Piers Plowman* tradition, p.8. It is to be hoped that the forthcoming edition of *The Plowman’s Tale* by Mary Rhinelanders McCarl will shed more light upon the issues of audience and reception.

²⁶ *Plowman’s Tale*, l.1039.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, ll.1041-1044.

²⁸ *Crede*, l.421.

²⁹ *Plowman’s Tale*, l.868.

that the Pellycan is ignorant, as he lives “in londe as a lorell,”³⁰ is reminiscent of Will’s self-defining claim that he has “lyved in londe,”³¹ yet once more the issues are simplified: Will’s self-conscious lack of “kynde knowynge,”³² which propels the action of *Piers Plowman*, is consigned to a casual insult which merely demonstrates the Gryffon’s coarse lack of subtlety.³³

When, in the sixteenth century, the prologue was added, the ploughman described was not the figure idealised to the point of virtual incorporeality by Chaucer, but the noble picture of physical endurance found in the *Crede*. In no better condition than his feeble beasts:

Men might have sene through both his chekes,
And every wang-toth and where it sat.³⁴

It is an acknowledgement of the lasting influence, not only of *Piers Plowman*, but of the “*Piers Plowman* tradition,” a body of work which took on a life of its own, independent of Langland’s original creation.

The role of *Piers Plowman* in the rising of 1381 has been noted above,³⁵ suggesting a figure who could be appropriated in support of political, as well as religious, dissent. Indeed, it has been said that

There must be few works which have been used to authorise both civil and

³⁰ *Ibid.*, I.1138.

³¹ *PPL.*, B XV 1.152.

³² *Ibid.*, B I 1.138.

³³ This opposition between those living virtuously “in londe” and the corrupt spiritual estate may be seen in the sequence of *Jack Upland*, *Friar Daw’s Reply*, and *Upland’s Rejoinder*, ed. P.L. Heyworth (Oxford, 1968). The chattering implications of the name Jack Daw in this case may be seen as a further instance of the opposition between he who works and he who merely talks - the “words and works” issue which provides one thread which runs throughout *Piers Plowman*.

³⁴ *Plowman’s Tale*, ll.15-16.

³⁵ See pp.51-52, 93.

religious dissent and which have also spawned a literary tradition.³⁶

In exploring further the works of the “*Piers Plowman* tradition” in the fifteenth century, however, the reader will notice that although it embodies a wide-ranging literature of comment and complaint, the ploughman himself became established solely as a figure with religious connotations. Indeed, the appropriation of the ploughman as a figure of dissent by the 1381 rebels appears to be a unique reading of the significance of Piers which was not followed in the medieval period.

As Justice has noted, John Ball’s complex appropriations of *Piers Plowman* are “willful, at least tangential to and mostly at odds with Langland’s purposes,”³⁷ and the “peasant letters” in effect “enjoin Piers to stop being Langland’s creation and become their own.”³⁸ Although Justice has been able to suggest a detailed and convincing process by which Langland’s Piers became the Piers of the letters, I suspect that few readers of the letters will disagree with Hudson’s assessment:

It can, I think, be argued without exemplification that the letters are obscure. If (the allusions to *Piers Plowman*) were understood by the recipients of the letters, those recipients must have either known the poem very well themselves, or have been taught to understand the references mnemonically by some individuals who did.³⁹

Whatever we may make of the enigmatic, quasi-apocalyptic exhortations of the rebel letters, it must be conceded that to find incitement to armed rebellion in *Piers Plowman* requires, as Bloom would put it, “a perverse or even ill-willed” reading. Whilst a purely anticlerical, or even Lollard, reading of *Piers Plowman* is, as we have seen, equally at odds with Langland’s apparent intention, the succession of corrupt or simply inadequate clerics who people his work requires little sophistry in reading to support such an interpretation.

³⁶ Barr, *Piers Plowman Tradition*, p.5.

³⁷ Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, p.111.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.121.

³⁹ Anne Hudson, “Piers Plowman and the Peasants’ Revolt: A Problem Revisited,” *YLS* 8 (1994): 88.

This may well underlie the failure of Piers to develop in the role of a watch-word for political dissent beyond the confines of the socially and historically specific community of the 1381 rebels.⁴⁰

Of the works apparently indebted to *Piers Plowman*, the two “advice to rulers” poems, *Richard the Redeless* and *The Crowned King*, are the most overtly concerned with secular politics.⁴¹ Whilst the latter lies outside the scope of the present discussion,⁴² a brief consideration of *Richard the Redeless* will help to illuminate the limiting of the ploughman’s role.

Now, Richard the redeles reweth on you-self,
That lawelesse leddyn youre lyf and youre peple bothe.⁴³

This address, from which the poem receives its modern title, explicitly claims Richard II as its dedicatee. However, as Barr has noted, the opening of *Richard* is “a tangled web of narrative disclaimers,”⁴⁴ and it seems highly likely that this address to Richard is merely a device to side-step open criticism of the reigning monarch, Henry IV.⁴⁵ “Reson is no reпреff,”⁴⁶ declares the poet, but pragmatically chooses to erect what literary defences he

⁴⁰ Of note in this respect is the Latin poem, *On the Council of London*, printed in Wright, *Political Poems and Songs* vol.1, pp.253-263. It is significant that this Wycliffite work, whilst dealing with a broad range of issues including the “Peasants’ Revolt,” invokes the name of Piers solely as a witness to the degenerate state of contemporary friars: “With an O and an I, fuerunt pyed freres; Quomodo mutati sunt rogo. dicat Peres.” The poem is discussed in Rigg, *A History of Anglo-Latin Literature*, pp.281-282.

⁴¹ Both works are edited in Barr, *Piers Plowman Tradition*. On the debt to *Piers Plowman* owed by *Richard the Redeless* and the closely-related *Mum and the Sothsegger*, see Alcuin G. Blamires, “*Mum and the Sothsegger* and Langlandian Idiom,” *NM* 76 (1975): 583-604. On the relationship between *Richard the Redeless* and *Mum and the Sothsegger*, see p.165 and n.53 below.

⁴² Whilst *The Crowned King* displays an undeniable debt to *Piers Plowman*, it has nothing to say on the subject of the Church, nor is the figure of the ploughman employed.

⁴³ *Richard*, I ll.88-89.

⁴⁴ Helen Barr, “The Dates of *Richard the Redeless* and *Mum and the Sothsegger*,” *N&Q* 235 (1990): 271.

⁴⁵ On internal evidence for dating, see *ibid.*, pp.270-275.

⁴⁶ *Richard*, I l.56.

may.

Richard contains many echoes of *Piers Plowman*, culminating in the reference to those who “Do-well for-soke” in the last line before the manuscript tantalisingly breaks off.⁴⁷ Yet this is not Langland’s “Do-well” of basic Christian responsibility, but that of the peasant letters: a social responsibility defined by the viewpoint of the particular writer. The “common profit” under consideration is purely temporal. Unlike the peasant letters, however, *Richard* does not invoke the figure of Piers himself. It is as if, in the wake of the “Peasants’ Revolt,” the association of the ploughman with political reform had accumulated too many dangerous connotations. The poet may call upon the king to take ultimate responsibility for the condition of the realm,⁴⁸ but there is no question of legitimising armed insurrection.

Indeed, the nominal address to Richard effectively undermines the force of any references to the uprising. Of the king’s retinue, the poet states that

Full preuyly they pluckud thy power away,
And reden with realte youre rewme thoru-oute,
And as tyrauntis, of tiliers token what hem liste,
And paide hem on her pannes when her penyes lacked.⁴⁹

The oppression of the poor, although pointedly referring to the “tiliers,” is set in the past tense, thereby constraining the conflict within a precisely defined period. It may be taken as a warning not to let history repeat itself, but it is, nonetheless, history.

Only once is the ploughman employed as an exemplary figure, in the assertion that the king should “laboure on the lawe as lewde men on plowes.”⁵⁰ Whilst providing a model of diligence, however, there is no suggestion that the *status quo* should in any way be inverted.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, IV l.93.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, I l.167.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, I ll.139-142.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, III l.267.

Once the point is made, the poet moves on, and the image is immediately discarded. Unlike *Crede*, the *Plowman's Tale*, *Mum and the Sothsegger*,⁵¹ and *Piers Plowman* itself, the ploughman is given no voice, and although the poet categorises himself as “lewed,”⁵² there is no suggestion that he identifies himself with the “lewde men on plowes.”

It has recently been suggested that *Mum and the Sothsegger*, once thought to be a fragment of a larger work of which *Richard the Redeless* was also a part, is a later composition by the same poet.⁵³ The only surviving manuscript is defective, the opening having been lost, but the beginning of the work as it now stands suggests a similar intention to that of *Richard*. The opening lines speak of

Hovgh the coroune moste be kept fro couetous people
Al hoole in his hande and at his heeste eke,
That euery knotte of the coroune close with other,
And not departid for prayer ne profit of grete.⁵⁴

The poet continues in this “advice to rulers” vein, proposing that the best kind of advice may only be obtained from that rarest of courtiers, “a sothe-sigger that seilde is y-seye,”⁵⁵ and the narrative becomes a quest for such a figure.

But now wolde I wite of a wise burne,
What kynnes creature that me couthe telle
Where to finde this freek, yf the king wolde
Haue hym in housholde as holsum were.⁵⁶

The quest parallels that of Will in *Piers Plowman*, yet whereas Will's quest is for

⁵¹ *Mum and the Sothsegger* will be discussed below.

⁵² *Richard*, II 1.53.

⁵³ Helen Barr, “The Relationship of *Richard the Redeless* and *Mum and the Sothsegger*: Some New Evidence,” *YLS* 4 (1990): 105-133. The two works were initially edited together as *Mum and the Sothsegger*, ed. M. Day and R. Steele (Oxford, 1936). Embree, however, argued that the works were, in fact independent of each other; a view which is now more commonly supported. See Dan Embree, “*Richard the Redeless* and *Mum and the Sothsegger*: A Case of Mistaken Identity,” *N&Q* 220 (1975): 4-12.

⁵⁴ *Mum*, ll.1-4.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.38.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, ll.99-102.

ultimate spiritual Truth, the narrator of *Mum* seeks the instruction of one who will reveal truth. Piers himself fulfils this role in Langland's work and, rather than being sought, he voluntarily presents himself to the would-be pilgrims. To their questions concerning Truth, he replies that, "I knowe hym as kyndely as clerlc doth his bokes."⁵⁷ Representing the pure essence of Christianity, he is a natural truth-teller, his ironic simile accentuating his superiority to those whose book-learning, although unsupported by spiritual depth, leads them to claim authority. The *Mum*-poet, however, first presents the search for the guide.

Rather than the authoritative ploughman, it is "a clerlc that concepte had" who puts himself forward,⁵⁸ not as a guide to Truth, but as a worldly authority upon the folly of truth-telling:

For alle the greet clerlcz that with the king lenthith
Knoweth this as kindly as clerlc doeth his bokes.⁵⁹

The verbal echo of *Piers* compounds the impression of falseness, for there is no spiritual depth to either point of comparison. Furthermore, this pronounced literary association serves to emphasise the elusiveness of the truth-teller: the encounter in *Mum* is set within the political realities of the world, not the spiritual verities of *Piers Plowman's* dream-visions.

The consideration of the political world in *Mum* is broader in its compass than in *Richard*, and soon reaches beyond merely temporal concerns to touch upon religious issues:

And yf a burne bolde hym to bable the sothe
And mynne hum of mischief that misse-reule asketh,
He may lose his life and laugh here no more,
Or y-putte into prisone or y-pyned to deeth
Or y-brent or y-shent or sum sorowe haue,
That fro scorne other scathe scape shal he neure.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ *PPL.*, B V l.538.

⁵⁸ *Mum*, l.103.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, ll.108-109.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, ll.165-170.

This reference to the persecution of truth-tellers, invoking the penalties which had been applied to Lollards in the 1401 statute *De haeretico comburendo*,⁶¹ introduces a suspiciously Lollard undercurrent which persists throughout the work.⁶² Even though this possible Lollardy never quite reaches the surface in the manner of *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*, anticlericalism plays a leading part in the social comment of *Mum*, with particular attention being given to the temporal presumptions of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Although the poem opens with advice to the king, in the course of the narrator's quest, it is the Doctor of Divinity who is shown to adopt a regal demeanour:

He satte as a souurayn on a high siege.
A doctour of doutz by dere God he semyd,
For he had loked al that lay to the vij. artz;
He was as ful of philosophie and vertues bothe
As man vppon molde mighte perceyue.⁶³

This description is loaded with dissimulation: he sat “as a souurayn,” he “semyd” like a doctor. The context lends the word “doutz” an air of suspicion concerning the figure's self-appointed status, and the final assertion that any man may see the extent of his “philosophie and vertues” becomes an acknowledgement of his successful blinding of others to the falseness of his position. In this description, we may note a close comparison with Langland's Doctor of Divinity, who makes great claims for his elevated status, but “that he precheth, he preveth noght:”⁶⁴ in spite of their claims and affectations, both figures act as guides only in as much as they personify the hypocrisy to be avoided by the narrator.

It is interesting to note that the *Mum*-poet, in defining the spiritual laxity of the clergy,

⁶¹ This point is noted in Lawton, “Lollardy and the *Piers Plowman* Tradition,” p.788.

⁶² On Lollardy in *Mum*, see *ibid.*, pp.788-793 and Barr, *Piers Plowman Tradition*, p.24 & notes. Barr has argued that “while the contest of *Mum* and Sothsegger is wider than the competition between orthodoxy and Lollardy, it is certainly... one of its vital components.” Barr, *Signes and Sothe*, p.108. The issue is discussed in full *ibid.*, pp.104-108, 113-115 and 125-132.

⁶³ *Mum*, ll.359-363.

⁶⁴ *PPl.*, B XIII l.79.

coupled with their material acquisitiveness, employs the familiar metaphor of ploughing. The collection of tithes which are not put to good use is described as taking a harvest for which the clergy will not help to plough:

And euer I waitid whenne he wolde sum worde moeve
How hooly churche goodes shuld be y-spendid,
And declare the deedes what thay do shulde
To haue suche a harueste and helpe not to erie.⁶⁵

Unlike the instances in *Richard*, this adopts the image of ploughing in the spiritual, metaphorical sense in which it is found in *Piers Plowman* and *Crede*.⁶⁶ Furthermore, it is not consigned to an enclosed past tense, but remains in the present as a living model of Christian conduct. That the clerics encountered by the narrator of *Mum* fail to live up to this model leaves a space within the work for a figure of authority who *is* a good “ploughman.”

In view of the falseness encountered by the narrator, it is apparent that the narrator must search further in order to find a “Sothsegger,” a narrative strategy familiar from earlier works of the “*Piers Plowman* tradition.” As Langland’s Will must first learn to “knowe the false” before Piers may instruct him in Truth,⁶⁷ so the narrator of *Crede* has to experience the “falshede” of the friars before he, in turn, encounters the truth-telling Piers.⁶⁸ A major difference between these two earlier works is that *Piers Plowman* describes much of the narrator’s quest with densely allegorical dream-visions, whilst *Crede* describes a waking

⁶⁵ *Mum*, ll.613-.616. Barr sees the discussion of tithing in *Mum* as further evidence of the poem’s Lollard complexion: Barr, *Signes and Sothe*, pp.129-131. The opposite figure, of course, is Chaucer’s Parson, of whom it is said, “Ful looth were hym to cursen for his tithes/But rather wolde he yeven, out of doute/Unto his povre parisshe aboute/Of his offryng and eek of his substaunce” [*CT.*, I (A), ll.486-489], a comparison made all the more striking by the Parson’s brotherhood with the diligently tithe-paying Plowman [*ibid.*, I (A), l.539-540]. On the relationship between Parson and Plowman, see chapter Five.

⁶⁶ The most notable examples are perhaps Piers’ assertion that “preires and penaunce” shall be his plough (*ibid.*, B VII l.120), and the harnessing of the four evangelists (B XIX ll.264-268), the latter of which finds an echo in *Crede* l.431.

⁶⁷ *PPl.*, B II l.4.

⁶⁸ *Crede*, l.419.

journey, albeit one with strong allegorical implications.⁶⁹ *Mum*, however, combines the two, with the exploration of falseness taking place in the narrator's waking state, and the discovery of truth occurring within a dream:

(I) lay dovne on a lynche to lithe my boones,
Rolling in remembrance my rennyng aboute
And alle the perillous patthes that I passid had,
As priories and personagz and pluralities,
Abbayes of Augustyn and other hooly places,
To knightes courtz and crafty men many,
To mayers and maisters, men of high wittes,
And to the felle freris, alle the foure ordres,
And other hobbes a-heepe, as ye herde haue -
And nought the neer by a note this noyed me ofte
That thorough construyng of clercz that knewe alle bokes
That Mum shuld be maister moste vpon erthe.⁷⁰

This transitional passage, in which the narrator, prior to his dream-vision, reviews his quest so far, is significant in revealing the concerns of the poet. Of those enumerated as self-interested agents of Mum, the clear majority are clerics. Although the poem commences in a spirit of concern for the office of the temporal ruler, the poet appears to find the greater fault within the religious orders, thereby suggesting, like Langland, that a corrupt society is rooted in a corrupt clergy.

More striking than this is the assertion that Mum should be master through “construyng of clercz that knewe alle bokes.” Whilst this is clearly linked to the earlier satirical condemnation of the value of a university education,⁷¹ it is nevertheless surprising that such an all-encompassing rebuttal of book-learning should be made by one who obviously not only knows his books, but is also prepared to offer Latin quotations from them when they may authorise his own arguments. Indeed, the critical stance of the poem

⁶⁹ It is worthy of note, however, that even in *Piers Plowman*, the inadequacy of the friars as spiritual guides is presented in the context of the narrator's waking state, thereby locating this failing unequivocally in the external world. See *PPL.*, B V ll.8-62.

⁷⁰ *Mum*, ll.857-868.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, ll.320ff. On the possible Lollard implications of such apparent hostility to university education, see Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, pp.224-227. See above, p.164-165, for the contrast between authority born of literacy and that which is rooted in spiritual purity.

is itself justified by biblical citation:

For go to the gospel that grovnd is of lore,
And there shal thou see thyself, yf thou can rede,
Whethir I wisse the wel wisely or elles.
He seith that thou shuldes the synne of thy brother
Telle hym by tyme and til hymself oon,
Yn ful wil to amende hym of his mysse-deedes.
*Si peccauerit in te frater tuus corrige etc.*⁷²

This apparent self-contradiction corresponds to a strategy of self-representation which is perhaps more clearly expressed in *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*. The narrator of the *Crede* avows his knowledge of his "A.b.c.,"⁷³ and may dispute with the friars on the ground of biblical knowledge,⁷⁴ yet he ultimately classifies himself as a "lewed man." In thus defining himself, the narrator becomes aligned with the conventionally "lewed," yet morally authoritative, position represented by Piers. From this association, it is but a short step to concatenate the voices of narrator, ploughman and poet,⁷⁵ thereby employing the expressed authority of the ploughman in order to authorise the poem itself. In the same way, the narrator of *Mum*, by associating book-learning with the false self-interest of Mum, seeks not to condemn himself, but to establish himself as being outside the accepted, corrupt hierarchy of the learned.⁷⁷ He is defining an alternative community of the paradoxically educated "lewed," in which his reader, who may well be able to "see things for himself" in the gospel,

⁷² *Mum*, ll.76-81a. The quotation - "if thy brother shall trespass against thee [go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone]" - is taken from Matthew 18:15. On the use of Latin quotations in *Mum*, see Barr, "Relationship," pp.115-118. We should, of course, note the striking final accumulation of authorities from the bag of books (*ibid.*, ll.1343ff.), which Barr has termed "a self-conscious proclamation of the political significance of literacy." Barr, *Signes and Sothe*, p.xiv.

⁷³ *Crede*, l.5.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, ll.259-263.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, l.840.

⁷⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, ll.836-837: "But all that euer I haue seyde soth it me semeth, / And all that euer I haue writen is soth." The already blurred distinction between the narrator, the ploughman and the poet himself appears to break down completely at this point.

⁷⁷ In this we may discern an echo of Langland's concern with the "right sort" of literacy; that which is legitimated by a firm association with good works. See Scase, "Writing and the Plowman," pp.121-131.

is implicitly included.

As the *Mum*-narrator falls asleep, however, he has yet to meet a “lewed” authority figure such as Piers,⁷⁸ but the circumstances of his sleeping suggest that such a meeting is imminent. Rather than on a generic “brood bank” or “floury flaȝt”⁷⁹ the narrator settles himself upon the unusually specific “lynche;” an un-ploughed area between two ploughed furrows. This un-ploughed land carries resonances of the negligent ploughmanship of the clergy earlier in the poem,⁸⁰ just as the barren landscape in which Piers is encountered in *Crede* carries allegorical connotations of the spiritual wasteland explored by the narrator.

The “lewed” authority figure encountered within the dream-vision in *Mum* is a bee-keeper, an appropriate explicator of the ensuing political allegory, derived from Bartholomæus Anglicus,⁸¹ which uses a discussion of the behaviour of bees in order to illustrate the workings of human society.⁸² Yet tending the hive is not the full extent of his duties. Indeed, the figure introduces himself thus:

“I am gardyner of this gate,” cothe he, “the grovnde is myn owen,
Forto digge and to delue and to do suche deedes
As longeth to this leyghttone the lawe wol I doo,
And wrote vp the wedes that wyrwen my plantes.”⁸³

Like Piers in *Piers Plowman*, the bee-keeper states that he digs and delves at the behest of a supreme authority,⁸⁴ in this case natural “lawe,” defined as a God-given propensity for

⁷⁸ For Langland, such an “unlearned authority” may be found amongst the generally corrupt clergy, as is the case with the “lewed vicory” encountered by Will in *PPL.*, B XIX l.412.

⁷⁹ *PPL.*, B Prologue l.8; *Pearl*, l.57.

⁸⁰ *Mum*, l.616. We may recall that the first act when Langland’s Piers puts the field of folk to work is to dig up the ridges (“balkes:” *PPL.*, B VI l.107)

⁸¹ The debt to Bartholomæus is acknowledged in *Mum*, ll.1028 and 1054.

⁸² *Ibid.*, ll.982ff.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, ll.976-979.

⁸⁴ See *PPL.*, B V l.545.

good which is innate in all humans.⁸⁵

I would not presume to deny that the main thrust of the poem is concerned with secular politics. Nevertheless, I would suggest that whilst the bee-keeper's allegorical lesson alludes specifically to the social "comune profit,"⁸⁶ the *Mum* poet consciously incorporates the established figure of the allegorical ploughman into his work in order to strengthen the anticlerical aspects which, as we have seen, run throughout his reformist satire. Unlike the *Crede* poet, the *Mum* poet, in spite of, or perhaps because of, an extensive knowledge of *Piers Plowman*, chooses not to invoke Piers himself. Such an explicit appropriation of Langland's figure would place the emphasis far too strongly on religious reform alone, yet at the foundation of the bee-keeper's political model may clearly be discerned the same God-given authority embodied in Piers:

For I wol go as nygh the grounde as gospel vs techeth
Forto wise the wisely to thy waie-is ende.⁸⁷

Whilst not Piers himself, the gardening bee-keeper is surely a close relative.⁸⁸

I have so far attempted to show, from a discussion of these few surviving works, that in the wake of *Piers Plowman* the figure of the ploughman became a vernacular representative of an anticlerical stance which, whilst not necessarily heterodox, acquired certain Lollard connotations. If this were indeed the case, one would expect some form of

⁸⁵ The bee-keeper's statement that "the grovnde is myn owen" surely puns on the word "grovnde," in the sense in which the poet asserts that the gospel "grovnd is of lore" (*Mum*, l.76). The "lawe" followed by the bee-keeper is that which is dictated by god. On the issue of natural law in the poem, see Helen Barr, "The Treatment of Natural Law in *Richard the Redeless* and *Mum and the Sothsegger*," *LSE n.s.* 23 (1992): 49-80.

⁸⁶ *Mum*, ll.997-1086.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, ll.1114-1115.

⁸⁸ As Barr has noted, the bee-keeper, in tending his garden, most closely resembles Piers in Passus XVI of the B-text, in which Piers tends and expounds upon the Tree of Charity. However, in the post-*Constitutions* context of *Mum*, the figure of the member of the third estate openly criticising clerical corruption has acquired far more radical connotations: Barr, *Signes and Sothe*, pp.107-108. These similarities in representation, therefore, should not obscure the differing complexions of the two works for, as we have seen in chapter Three, although *Piers Plowman* offers incisive criticism of the clergy, Langland's Piers, unlike the bee-keeper of *Mum*, does not transgress the boundaries of orthodox acceptability.

response from the orthodox Church, and I would like now to turn briefly to two sources in which I believe that such a response may be detected.

Bodleian Library, MS Greaves 54, a religious miscellany of the fifteenth century, contains an item that Fletcher has termed “a unique, if fragmentary, Middle English translation of the *Fasciculus (morum)*.”⁸⁹ He has demonstrated the close relationship between certain *exempla* in *Fasciculus morum* and the later vernacular work,⁹⁰ although the sermons in which these exempla are set contain marked differences. Most notably, the Greaves sermon contains an extended metaphor of sin as earth, which blocks the ears of the sinner to the good words of the gospel. For example:

A covetise Man . his eris buth stoppid with erth . ffor he covetith nouȝt to her[e]
his s[er]vyse / butt off the covetise of the world / the whiche is butt erth.⁹¹

It has already been noted that *Fasciculus morum* contains the metaphor of the “ploughshare of confession,”⁹² so it is perhaps surprising that the later writer, obviously sufficiently familiar with the work to borrow useful *exempla*, chose not to make use of this apposite metaphor as a method of breaking up the “earth of sin.” This is all the more striking as the “water of penance” is suggested in order to quench the fire of lust,⁹³ whilst the problem of the “earth” remains unresolved. I would suggest that this offers a glimpse of another side of the “*Piers Plowman* tradition,” in which the metaphor of ploughing is removed from orthodox discourse due to the accumulation of heterodox connotations.

⁸⁹ Alan J. Fletcher, “*Fasciculus morum: A Fourteenth-Century Preacher’s Handbook*, ed. Siegfried Wenzel,” *YLS* 4 (1990): 185. Wenzel, however, maintains that this item does not constitute a Middle English translation of *Fasciculus morum*, “not even a ‘fragmentary’ one.” Siegfried Wenzel, “H. Leith Spencer, *English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages*,” *YLS* 9 (1995): 202.

⁹⁰ Alan J. Fletcher, “Chaucer’s Norfolk Reeve,” *MAE* 52 (1983): 101, cites parallel passages concerning the cunning of a Norfolk bailiff. Also, Greaves 54 f.122v recounts the tale of St. Furseus from Bede’s “gest[e]s of Englonde,” which occurs in *Fasciculus morum*, p.135.

⁹¹ Greaves 54 f.120v. Similar examples occur at ff.121v, 122r & 123v.

⁹² *Fasciculus morum*, p.548. See above, chapter Two.

⁹³ Greaves 54 f.125v.

It is, of course, difficult to find evidence to show a concerted excision of the ploughman, but a further example from a preaching aid of the fifteenth century may here be cited. John Mirk's *Festial*, a sermon collection of the late fourteenth century,⁹⁴ records an interesting anecdote concerning the birth of Christ:

That same tyme as men of þe countrey ȝeden at þe plogh, exen speken to the plogh-men and sayden: "Þese sedys schull encrese and men schull wax few."⁹⁵

Later recensions of this sermon, however, whilst remaining largely faithful to Mirk's model, omit this incident.⁹⁶ Powell characterises this as an omission of "dubious and unauthenticated facts asserted by Mirk,"⁹⁷ but it is possible that the reason for such an omission was more profound. As has been noted, the ploughman had long been established as a figure corresponding to both preacher and penitent, and in this context the miraculous address by the oxen at the instant of Christ's birth is entirely appropriate.⁹⁸ However, it is possible that these later excisions show a response to the heterodox appropriation of the ploughman which had opened up potentially dangerous interpretations for an anecdote concerning the apparent singling out of ploughmen by God.

In discussing the prohibition of texts which aroused even the slightest suspicion of Lollardy in the fifteenth century, Hudson has stated that

⁹⁴ On dating and distribution of Mirk's *Festial*, see Susan Powell, "John Mirk's *Festial* and the Pastoral Programme," *LSE* n.s. 22 (1991): 85-102. Fletcher has suggested that Mirk originally composed this work between 1382 and 1390, with the specific, although unstated aim of countering Lollardy: Alan J. Fletcher, "John Mirk and the Lollards," *MAE* 56 (1987): 217-224.

⁹⁵ John Mirk, *Festial*, ed. Theodor Erbe (London, 1905), p.23. This apocryphal tale may well derive from Isaiah 1.3: "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."

⁹⁶ Susan Powell (ed.), *The Advent and Nativity Sermons from a Fifteenth-Century Revision of John Mirk's Festial*, edited from B.L. MSS Harley 2247, Royal 18 B XXV and Gloucester Cathedral Library 22 (Heidelberg, 1981), p.82. On the nature, and sources, of subsequent revisions, see Susan Powell, "A Critical Edition of the *Temporale* Sermons of MSS Harley 2247 and Royal B XXV" (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of London, 1980), vol.2, p.48.

⁹⁷ Powell, *Advent and Nativity Sermons*, p.29.

⁹⁸ Indeed, it is possible that Langland had this tradition in mind when he portrayed Piers' plough as being drawn by oxen representing the four evangelists. In *PPL*, B XIX ll.264-268.

One must, I think, conclude that accident alone is responsible for the absence of mention of *Piers Plowman* from episcopal enquiries into Lollardy.⁹⁹

By the time of Arundel's *Constitutions* of 1409, the mere fact of the use of the written vernacular carried with it suspicions of Lollardy,¹⁰⁰ so we may reasonably assume that copies of *Piers Plowman* would, at some stage, have been considered.¹⁰¹ Whilst it is indeed possible that records detailing enquiries and confiscations have been lost, in the case of such a widely-disseminated and, furthermore, influential work, this would be somewhat surprising. Rather, it would appear more likely that, like other works whose orthodoxy was unquestioned by an enquiring body familiar with its antecedents,¹⁰² *Piers Plowman* was not suppressed in its existing form, but changes were deemed necessary in response to the accumulation of heterodox connotations around the poem's central figure. In this light, the process of revision which gave rise to the C-text - and possibly the A-text - of *Piers Plowman* may be characterised as an attempt by Langland to clarify the poem's purpose, and thereby limit its potential for misinterpretation. It is, in effect, Langland's own contribution to the "*Piers Plowman* tradition," as he responds to contemporary readings of his work and

⁹⁹ Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, p.433. This hypothesis has recently been upheld by Bowers, who suggests that "many copies were lost as victims not of mere wear and tear, but of confiscation and destruction, even destruction by owners wishing to avoid the potential for unpleasant consequences:" Bowers, "*Piers Plowman* and the Police," p.17. However, the continued lack of evidence for any such confiscations leaves the case open for other interpretations.

¹⁰⁰ See Anne Hudson, "Lollardy: The English Heresy?," in *Lollards and their Books*, ed. Anne Hudson (London, 1985), pp.146-149.

¹⁰¹ The subject of proscribed books is, of course, problematic, for although Lollard ideas could be traced and punished, the movement lacked the cohesion provided by an acknowledged leader acting as a fountainhead of heretical texts. Whilst, for example, the Dominican inquisitor Bernard Gui could focus his investigations upon specific works by Olivi, frequently anonymous Lollard authors were less immediately identifiable. On Gui's investigations into heterodox reading material, see the extracts from his *Practica inquisitionis heretice pravitatis* of circa 1323-1324, in Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans (ed. and trans.), *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York, 1969), pp.431-434.

¹⁰² Such as Mirk's *Festial* and *Fasciculus morum*, discussed above.

attempts to regain control over its meaning.¹⁰³

Donaldson has noted that, throughout the C-text, the image of the plough is more dominant than in the B-text.¹⁰⁴ In spite of this, however, the importance of Piers the ploughman is suppressed at crucial points which we have had cause to consider earlier. In considering the nature of pardons, for example,¹⁰⁵ the striking rejection of the contemporary system enacted in Piers' tearing of the written document in the A and B versions is diluted to an inconclusive squabble - "the prest thus and Perkyn of þe pardon iangelede" - in the C-text.¹⁰⁶

The deflection of emphasis away from Piers may most clearly be seen in Anima's advice to Will upon the subject of how Charity may be found. The B-text presents the exchange thus:

"By Crist! I wolde that I knewe hym," quod I, "no creature levere!"
"Withouten help of Piers Plowman," quod he, "his persone sestow nevere."
"Wheither clerkes knowen hym," quod I, "that kepen Holi Kirke?"
"Clerkes have no knowyng," quod he, "but by werkes and by wordes.
Ac Piers the Plowman parceyveth moore depper
What is the wille, and wherfore that many wight suffreth:
*Et vidit Deus cogitaciones eorum.*¹⁰⁷

Therefore by colour ne clergie knowe shaltow hym nevere,
Neither thorough wordes ne werkes, but thorough wil oone,
And that knoweth no clerk ne creature on erthe
But Piers the Plowman - *Petrus, id est, Christus.*¹⁰⁸

Before the corresponding passage in the C-text, Anima informs Will that "Charite is a

¹⁰³ Any discussion of Langland's revisions must, of course, take heed of Russell's warnings of the "complex and often intractable" nature of the problems faced in attempting to determine authorial readings: G.H. Russell, "Some Aspects of the process of Revision in *Piers Plowman*," in *Piers Plowman: Critical Approaches*, ed. S.S. Hussey (London, 1969), p.49.

¹⁰⁴ Donaldson, *Piers Plowman: The C-Text and its Poet*, pp.74-75.

¹⁰⁵ See above, pp.61-64.

¹⁰⁶ *PPL.*, A VIII l.101; B VII l.115; C IX l.294.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, B XV ll.195-200a.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, B XV ll.209-212.

childische thyng, as holy churche witnesseth,”¹⁰⁹ thereby placing the ensuing discussion unequivocally within an area defined by the authority of the Church. The exchange between Anima and Will is then considerably altered:

“Where clerkes knowe hym nat,” quod y, þat kepen holy churche?”
“Peres the plouhman,” quod he, “moste parfitlyche hym knoweth.
Et vidit deus cogitaciones eorum.
By clothyng ne by carpyng knowe shaltow hym neuere,
Ac thorw werkes thow myhte wyte wher-forth he walketh.
*Operibus credite.*¹¹⁰

There has been a marked shift between the two versions, in that the C-text openly contradicts the B-text in asserting that outward actions may reveal Charity. More significant to the present discussion, however, is the diminution of the importance accorded to Piers. Whilst Piers still knows Charity “moste parfitlyche,” he is no longer presented as the essential element of understanding. Furthermore, his opposition to insufficiently perceptive clerics is played down in the revision, to the extent that in the C-text Anima may be seen to dodge the question somewhat in order to reduce possible anticlerical implications.¹¹¹ Finally, the potentially ambiguous “*Petrus, id est, Christus*” is removed altogether, thereby eliminating the opportunity for a reading which elevates a lay figure to Christ-like status.¹¹² The resulting C-text passage is undoubtedly much less satisfying, with the name of “Peres the Plouhman” being invoked only to be stripped of much of its accumulated gravitas and authority, in what can surely only be a response to misappropriations of Langland’s creation by outside forces.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, C XVII.296. B XV l.149 refers to Charity as a “childissh thyng,” but without mention of “holy churche.”

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, C XVI ll.336-339a.

¹¹¹ The B-text repetition of “words and works” as inadequate criteria for judgement implicates Will as one of the failing clerics. The punning assertion that he may only know Charity “thorough wil oone” further suggests self-criticism which may be remedied by self-knowledge in accordance with all that is represented by Piers. The C-text revision, by not directly answering Will’s question, avoids explicit anticlericalism.

¹¹² See p.79 above.

The irony of Langland's dilution of the potency of Piers is profoundly displayed in the revision of the Tree of Charity episode. As has been discussed above,¹¹³ this marks the transitional point at which the dreamer may be considered to have learnt the false, and at which he may begin to learn the true. In the B-text, the simple mention of Piers' name as overseer of the garden (Herte) in which the Tree stands draws forth an intense reaction which, as we have seen, would be shared by subsequent writers of the "*Piers Plowman* tradition."

"Piers the Plowman!" quod I tho, and al for pure joye
That I herde nempne his name anoon I swowned after.¹¹⁴

Paradoxically, it is this widespread recognition of Piers which necessitated his removal by his creator from the episode in the C-text. The lesson of the Tree may still be expounded,¹¹⁵ but by the emphatically allegorical *Liberum Arbitrium*, rather than Piers, who had become all too concrete in the world of ideas outside Langland's work.

It was, of course, impossible to remove Piers entirely from a poem in which he was the central character without making a new poem altogether,¹¹⁶ and there is a notable instance at which Piers makes an appearance in the C-text, whereas he had merely been mentioned in the B version. At Patience's feast in the B-text, it is Conscience who, quoting Matthew 22.37, states that "the patient conquer" (*pacientes vincunt*),¹¹⁷ citing Piers as an exemplar who will come, Christ-like, to personify the ideal. In the C-text, however, it is

¹¹³ See p.79 above.

¹¹⁴ *PPl.*, B XVI ll.18-19.

¹¹⁵ This occurs in *Ibid.*, C XVIII.

¹¹⁶ Bowers, however, refers to an exceptional case in which this may have been attempted, albeit in the crudest of manners. In the manuscript Huntington HM 143 the name "Piers Plowman" has been systematically erased throughout the text. See Bowers, "Piers Plowman and the Police," p.6. Russell, however, in discussing this manuscript, concludes that, "clearly the ink of the text was to be replaced by the red of the rubricator." Russell, "Some Early Responses to the C-Version," p.278.

¹¹⁷ *PPl.*, B XIII l.134a

Piers himself who mysteriously appears in order to deliver these words of wisdom before making an equally abrupt exit.¹¹⁸ In introducing this rather awkward appearance, Langland modifies Piers in two ways. First, as a physical presence the Christ-like connotations are diminished, and he instead becomes the preacher, disseminating the Word of God.¹¹⁹ Secondly, and perhaps just as importantly, in counselling patience himself, Langland's Piers is pointedly presented as the antithesis of the voice of dissent which he had become in the hands of others.

Langland's main objective in writing the C-text appears to have been the clarification of his position in a work which was already widely read. The specific application of the ploughing metaphor to the preaching of the ordained clergy, therefore, may be read as a further attempt to limit misinterpretation by reinforcing the allegorical nature of his conception of the ploughman:

Prelates and prestes and princes of holy churche
 Sholde nat doute no deth ne no dere 3eres
 To wende as wyde as þe worlde were
 To tulie þe erthe with tonge and teche men to louye.¹²⁰

This notion of tilling the earth with the tongue belongs to a tradition which may be traced to Gregory the Great, who wrote of

some who, always intent on hearing and retaining holy preachings and meditations, are cut away from their former hardness of mind, as if by a plowshare of the tongue, and receive the seeds of exhortation, and through the furrows of voluntary affliction render fruits of good work.¹²¹

By employing this established metaphor, Piers, as the human ideal of Christianity, becomes

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, C XV ll.138-150.

¹¹⁹ I here disagree with Pearsall who, in the notes to this passage in his edition of the C-text, sees Piers as speaking "as Christ in his life upon earth, verifying, in the presence of his Father, his own words in the gospels, concerning the charity which grows out of patience."

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, C X ll.196-199.

¹²¹ Barney, "The Plowshare of the Tongue," pp.269-270.

more explicitly a role model to be imitated by the clergy.¹²² We should, of course, remember also that it is in the C revision that Will's "biographical details" are most extensively recounted,¹²³ thereby explicitly drawing attention to the clerical status of the recipient of the wisdom gained throughout the work.

Mann's case for considering that the A-text of *Piers Plowman* does not represent Langland's first version of the poem, but rather a later, unfinished "condensed" version,¹²⁴ may also suggest a revision process rooted in necessity. Mann suggests that the motivation behind such an editorial undertaking may have been to reach a wider audience who would be excluded by the complexities (and the Latin) of the B-text, hence the production of

a simplified version, stressing the practical duties of Christian living, reducing the text's metaphoric complexities, and toning down its social criticisms.¹²⁵

I would suggest, however, that Langland may have witnessed his work already being misread, misunderstood and misappropriated by this initially unforeseen audience, and embarked upon the A-revision late in life in the hope of providing a corrective.¹²⁶

That *Piers Plowman* is not mentioned in the records of enquiries into Lollardy does, I would argue, suggest that the episcopal authorities recognised sources of which Langland made use, and would, therefore, recognise the orthodoxy of his work. Hudson draws attention to the case of *Dives and Pauper*, an early fifteenth-century work of "radical

¹²² The exhortation to "doute no deth nother dere 3eres" may be seen as a call to emulate Piers' triumph over Hunger in *PPL.*, B VI/C VIII. For a more extensive discussion of the relationship between Piers and the ideal preacher in *Piers Plowman*, see Hardwick, "Ploughmen, Poets and Preachers," pp.5-21.

¹²³ See especially *PPL.*, C V ll.35-52.

¹²⁴ See above, p.91.

¹²⁵ Mann, "Power of the Alphabet," p.46.

¹²⁶ As Mann notes, John But's continuation of the A-text (Bodley Rawlinson Poetry 137, printed as an Appendix to Kane's), in which it is claimed that "whan þis werk was wrou3t, er wille my3te asprie, / Dep delt hym a dent and drof him to þe erþe" (ll.101-104), provides the convincing explanation for the A-version's incompleteness that Langland simply did not live to finish his revision: Mann, "Power of the Alphabet," pp.46-47. On But, see Anne Middleton, "Making a Good End: John But as a Reader of *Piers Plowman*," in *Medieval Studies Presented to George Kane*, ed. Edward Donald Kennedy *et al* (Woodbridge, 1988), pp.243-266; Barron, "William Langland: A London Poet," pp.101-104.

orthodoxy,” expressing an outlook “roughly comparable with that expressed in *Piers Plowman*.”¹²⁷ Within a few years of 1430, *Dives and Pauper* was both cited as a heretical text by Alnwick and commissioned by the unimpeachably orthodox abbot Whethamstede for the library at St. Albans.¹²⁸ Hudson suggests that this apparent paradox indicates that the issue of the work’s orthodoxy was contingent upon ownership: what was acceptable within the confines of a Benedictine monastery was not necessarily suitable for a lay reader. We may expect a similar response to *Piers Plowman*, but I would suggest that its having been written, and widely circulated, some years before Arundel’s *Constitutions* would have allowed the authorities to have made up their minds about the orthodoxy of the work in a less threatening era.

Subsequent revisions in the C- (and possibly A-) text may even have been commended for their attempts at clarification.¹²⁹ Nonetheless, it would appear that Langland’s revision was largely in vain, for by the act of writing *Piers Plowman* in English, he had already loosed a figure who would remain a symbol of lay religious authority and a personification of the raised English anticlerical voice for two centuries. Whilst judicious re-writing could clarify authorial intention for future readers, the “*Piers Plowman* tradition” had out-grown the work itself, and could not be brought in check by what was, in effect, merely another contribution to that tradition.

In rendering the tradition of allegorical ploughing out of its original Latin, with all its concomitant limitations of audience, and into the widely-used, and consequently ungovernable, English vernacular, Langland had unwittingly emphasised the prosaic nature

¹²⁷ Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, p.421.

¹²⁸ These cases are discussed in *ibid.*, 417-421.

¹²⁹ Whilst it is impossible to know precise details of the circulation of successive versions of the poem, the survival of survival of hybrid texts which conflate elements of A, B and C-texts suggests the possibility that at least some readers knew more than one version.

of the ploughman to an audience not attuned to the allegorical connotations of the image. Piers, originally a complex exemplar for orthodox clerical reform had, by the time of *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*, been interpreted by a vernacular audience as an actual ploughman, undermining the institutional authority of the Church from the outside. By the time that the sixteenth-century continuator of the *Canterbury Tales* recruited Chaucer to the ranks of the fathers of the Reformation, by fashioning the Lollard debate between Pellycan and Gryffon into what has been called "the most influential of all the poems in the Chaucer apocrypha,"¹³⁰ it was inevitable that the Ploughman - implicitly *Piers* the ploughman - should "tell us some holy thyng,"¹³¹ in the English vernacular, to the detriment of the institutionalised Church.

In the preceding examination of *Piers Plowman* and its appropriations by subsequent writers, we have seen a particular example of the destabilising effect upon the Church of the growth of religious discussion in the vernacular. The unequivocally orthodox, by the mere fact of its translation and its consequent availability to the laity, became potentially threatening to the ecclesiastical hierarchy even when, as in the case of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* - and, indeed, *Piers Plowman* itself - the vernacular work ostensibly supported the *status quo*.

I have suggested above that, in the cases of Greaves MS 54 and later recensions of Mirk's *Festial*, we may observe attempts to deal with the threat of the "*Piers Plowman* tradition," by the excision of analogous material from pastoral literature. These examples, however, are only tantalising hints of possible specific, limited responses to this particular aspect of the lay appropriation of vernacular religious discourses. In the following chapter,

¹³⁰ Andrew N. Wawn, "Chaucer, *The Plowman's Tale* and Reformation Propaganda: The Testimonies of Thomas Godfray and *I Playne Piers*," *BJRL* 56 (1973-1974): 192.

¹³¹ *Plowman's Tale*, l.45.

therefore, I shall explore larger-scale ecclesiastical responses to the uncontrollably widening sphere of hitherto exclusively clerical discourses, of which the “*Piers Plowman* tradition” is but a part.

CHAPTER 7

THE THREAT OF THE “UNRULY” VERNACULAR

In my first chapter, I discussed the situation in the fourteenth century in which the Church's growing emphasis upon individual lay piety acted in concert with the independent phenomenon of increased popular vernacular literacy. These factors combined to form a literate lay audience for vernacular religious works which, in consequence, could question the need for a mediating clergy. In subsequent chapters, I have explored the way in which one particular work intended for a clerical readership - Langland's *Piers Plowman* - once appropriated by a lay interpretative community, could be mobilised, either directly or by association, in order to support a wide range of anticlerical stances, both orthodox and heterodox. Some aspects of the Church's response to the vernacularisation and lay appropriation of elements of religious discourse have been considered briefly in my previous chapter, and I shall turn now to a broader viewpoint in order to explore the destabilising effects of this erosion of the protective boundaries which had hitherto defined the proper spheres of the clergy and the laity.

In approaching the ideology of translation from Latin into English in the late fourteenth century, we are fortunate in having a work dealing with this subject by “one of the most versatile and prolific of translators into Middle English,” John Trevisa.¹ Whilst Trevisa's prolific output almost exclusively comprises works of translation, amongst his few

¹ Anthony S.G. Edwards, “John Trevisa,” in *Middle English Prose: A Critical Guide to Major Authors and Genres*, ed. A.S.G. Edwards (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1984), p.141. On Trevisa, see also David C. Fowler, “New Light on John Trevisa,” *Traditio* 18 (1962): 289-317 and David C. Fowler, “More about John Trevisa,” *MLQ* 32 (1971): 243-254. The most recent study of available biographical and bibliographical evidence is David C. Fowler, *John Trevisa* (Aldershot, 1993).

short original works is the *Dialogue between a Lord and a Clerk*,² which employs the form of a debate in order to present the case for and against the act of translation and, ultimately, to validate the role of the translator.

Trevisa's *Dialogue* appears as a prologue to his translation of Ranulph Higden's widely read *Polychronicon*, which was completed in 1387, and survives in five of the fourteen extant manuscripts. The arguments in favour of translation are placed in the mouth of the socially superior Lord, who commences by referring specifically to the *Polychronicon* itself,³ stating simply that

parynne ys noble and gret informacion and lore to hem þat can parynne rede and understonde. Þarvore ich wolde have þeus bokes of cronyks translated out of Latyn ynto Englysch, for þe mo men scholde hem understonde and have þereof konnyng, informacion and lore.⁴

Arguments against translation, on the other hand, are attributed to the Clerk.⁵ As the debate is used to introduce an actual work of translation, it may safely be assumed that Trevisa's own views on the issue are consonant with those attributed to the Lord, and that the Clerk's counter-arguments are put forward purely to provide the opportunity for further exposition upon the positive effects of the translation of Latin works in order that "so meny þe mo men scholde understonde ham as understondeþ Englysch and no Latyn."

It should be noted, however, that the exact nature of this projected audience is not stated. In a dedicatory epistle, Trevisa's patron, "Thomas, lord of Berkeleye," is specifically

² The most recent edition, to which all subsequent references are made, is John Trevisa, *Dialogue between a Lord and a Clerk*, in *A Book of Middle English*, ed. J.A. Burrow and Thorlac Turville-Petre (Oxford, 1992), pp.214-220.

³ On Higden's *Polychronicon*, see John Taylor, *The Universal Chronicle of Ranulf Higden* (Oxford, 1966), with particular reference to pp.142-147 for its far-reaching influence in late fourteenth-century England.

⁴ Trevisa, *Dialogue*, p.215.

⁵ The argument that "þe Latyn ys boþe good and fayr. Þarvore hyt neodeþ noȝt to han an Englysch translacion," for example, is given very short shrift indeed: *Ibid.*, p.216.

addressed,⁶ but the phrase “so meny þe mo men” surely suggests that a wider, if unspecified, audience was envisaged. Fowler has compared the *Dialogue* with the disputes undertaken in the schools, in which Trevisa must have taken part during his time at Oxford,⁷ so it may perhaps be inferred that the work was written with an academic readership in mind.

Whatever the nature of this projected audience, it is curious to note that the Lord goes beyond the simple argument of making the *Polychronicon* available to a wider potential readership, and invokes a surprising example in order to clinch his argument - that of biblical translation:

Also holy wryt in Latyn ys boþe good and fayr, and 3et for to make a sermon of holy wryt al yn Latyn to men þat konneþ Englysch and no Latyn hyt were a lewed dede; vor hy buþ nevere þe wyser vor þe Latyn bote hyt be told hem an Englysch what hyt ys to mene, and hyt may no3t be told an Englysch what þe Latyn ys to mene withoute translacion out of Latyn in Englysch. Þanne hyt nedep to have an Englysch translacion.⁸

Although nominally still discussing the merits of translating the *Polychronicon*, the Lord sees fit to support his argument by comparison with the most important of written texts, the Bible. Here, according to the Lord, is one case in which translation from Latin into English, as practised by the clergy in composing sermons based on biblical texts, is clearly essential in order to transmit the Word of God to a “lewed” laity. By invoking the authority of this crucial precedent, Trevisa seeks to place the process of translation beyond attack. It could be argued, however, that this form of biblical translation does not necessitate the production

⁶ The epistle is edited in Ronald Waldron, “Trevisa’s Original Prefaces on Translation: A Critical Edition,” in *Medieval English Studies Presented to George Kane*, ed. Edward Donald Kennedy *et al* (Woodbridge, 1988), pp.294-295.

⁷ Fowler, *John Trevisa*, p.9. On the discursive strategy of Trevisa’s *Dialogue*, see Ronald Waldron, “John Trevisa and the Use of English,” *PBA* 74 (1988): 173-178. Copeland has drawn attention to the contemporary European literary *topos* in which a discussion of the relative merits of Latin and a European vernacular is presented in the form of a dialogue between a cleric and a layman: Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*, p.134.

⁸ Trevisa, *Dialogue*, p.217.

of a written vernacular text, as a sermon is delivered orally.⁹ Nevertheless, Trevisa goes on to address this very issue, invoking the textual history of the Bible itself and arguing that

holy wryt was translated out of Hebrew ynto Gru into Latyn, and þanne out of
Latyn ynto Frensch. Þanne what haþ Englysch trespassed þat hyt myȝt noȝt be
translated into Englysch?¹⁰

With this rhetorical question, Trevisa's argument shifts subtly from a defence of the practice of translation to a defence of the English vernacular itself. Deanesly has argued that Trevisa's comments indicate that he "knew of no recognised Middle-English translations (of the Bible) to instance."¹¹ More recently, Fowler has suggested that this is to infer too much, and that the most that can be said is that in the *Dialogue*, Trevisa does not explicitly refer to any Middle English translation.¹² The question which perhaps needs to be asked, however, is: why does Trevisa refer to any biblical translation at all? Although Trevisa's dedicatory epistle to Lord Berkeley, in which he claims that he will undertake the translation of the *Polychronicon* in spite of "blame of bakbyters...enuye of enemys (and) euel spyȝtyng and speche of euel spekers,"¹³ suggests that he felt a need to defend his work, the citation of biblical translation would surely be more likely to provoke controversy than to appease critics. I would suggest, therefore, that the invocation of biblical translation, taken in context, shows Trevisa deliberately going out of his way to engage with an on-going debate amongst his peers at Oxford concerning the validity and legitimacy of the translation of the Bible into English. There is, however, no clear evidence for such a debate until slightly later than Trevisa's time at Oxford, but as the translation of the Bible is a project with which it

⁹ On the relationship in sermon literature between written Latin and spoken English, see chapter One.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.218.

¹¹ Margaret Deanesly, *The Lollard Bible and other Medieval Biblical Versions* (reprint, Cambridge, 1966), p.250.

¹² David C. Fowler, "John Trevisa and the English Bible," *MP* 58 (1960): 88.

¹³ Waldron, "Trevisa's Original Prefaces," p.294.

is possible that Trevisa himself was involved,¹⁴ and one which was certainly being undertaken around this time, it would be most surprising if the subject were not being hotly debated.

Turning to this evidence for discussion at Oxford of the issues surrounding biblical translation, a series of three *determinationes* on the subject, of the early years of the fifteenth century,¹⁵ evince the fact that, in spite of increased suppression of Lollard ideas, the case had not been firmly closed.¹⁶ Indeed, in the light of subsequent developments, it has become frequently overlooked that

In 1401 the question of biblical translation could be debated openly, without accusations of heresy being levelled against defenders of the view, and without identification of the proponents of translation as *Wycliffistes*.¹⁷

Although Trevisa was, as we have seen, expecting adverse responses to his views on translation, he was nonetheless addressing what was still, at that time, a legitimate topic for discussion.¹⁸ At the same time, however, it must be remembered that the earliest texts of the Wycliffite Bible, with or without Trevisa's involvement, were being produced, almost

¹⁴ The tradition of Trevisa's translation of the Bible is first mentioned in Caxton's 1460 prologue to the printed edition of the *Polychronicon*, which he refers to as having been "englisshed by one Trevisa vycarye of barkley / which atte request of one Sir thomas lord barkley translated this sayd book / the byble & bartylmew de proprietatibus rerum out of latyn into englyssh:" William Caxton, *The Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton*, ed. W.J.B. Crotch (London, 1928), p.67. Whilst Caxton's claim that Trevisa had been solely responsible for the translation of the Bible into English is extremely unlikely, Fowler has argued for the possibility of Trevisa having been in some way involved in a group undertaking of such a project in Oxford in the 1370s: Fowler, "John Trevisa and the English Bible," p.95. Whether or not he was directly involved in biblical translation, the *Dialogue* certainly evinces a personal concern with the ideological complexities of the project.

¹⁵ Only one of the *determinationes* is dated in the manuscript, with the year being given as 1401. As Hudson has noted, however, none of the texts refer to the legitimacy of biblical translation having been settled by legislation, so it is likely that all were written before Arundel's *Constitutions* of 1407: Anne Hudson, "The Debate on Bible Translation, Oxford 1401," *EHR* 90 (1975): 3.

¹⁶ These *determinationes* are reproduced in Deanesly, *Lollard Bible*, pp.401-445. Most recently, the debate has been reviewed in Nicholas Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's *Constitutions* of 1409," *Spec* 70 (1995): 840-846.

¹⁷ Hudson, "Debate on Bible Translation," p.17.

¹⁸ Indeed, Richard Ullerston's contribution to the Oxford debate made use of a similar citation of precedent to that which we have seen employed by Trevisa. See Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change," pp.844-845.

certainly in Oxford, in the last quarter of the fourteenth century,¹⁹ so the debate was effectively concerned with the legitimacy of a process which had already occurred.²⁰

It was only in the wake of Arundel's *Constitutions* that the issue was officially decided, with Article Seven explicitly forbidding not only the translation of scripture into English but also the possession of any rendering of the Bible in English made since the time of Wyclif, unless diocesan permission had been granted.²¹ Davies has argued that, faced with the threat of Lollardy, Arundel could not possibly have acted in a way which would have satisfied all parties; whatever his response, it would inevitably have been seen either as over-reaction or, conversely, under-reaction by one faction or the other.²² In the event, the hard line which he elected to take, which Watson has described as "the linchpin of a broader attempt to limit religious discussion and writing in the vernacular,"²³ effectively silenced the debate in orthodox circles. Nonetheless, although "it is hard...to find any theologically complex texts written after 1410 in free circulation amongst the laity, at least until the last years of the century,"²⁴ there is evidence to suggest that the attempted suppression of vernacular religious discussion was far from complete in its success.

We have seen in the previous chapters how the figure of Piers Plowman, once adopted by Lollard writers, continued to be employed as an anticlerical mouthpiece in both orthodox

¹⁹ The process by which the Wycliffite Bible came into existence remains far from clear, but for present purposes this generalisation will suffice. For a comprehensive review of the scholarship on this issue, see Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, pp.238-247.

²⁰ In such a belated attempt to reassert control over access to the Bible we may note the same impulse, discussed in chapter Six, which led to Langland's attempts to "rehabilitate" Piers and wrest him once more from the lay domain.

²¹ *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae* vol. 3, p.317.

²² Richard G. Davies, "Thomas Arundel as Archbishop of Canterbury, 1396-1414," *JEH* 24 (1973): 20-21.

²³ Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change," p.824.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.48.

and heterodox works. Whilst overtly Lollard opinions are less pronounced in works after *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*, the persistent currency of the figure evinces a continuity of ideas. Concurrently, orthodox arguments concerning the legitimacy of biblical translation into English were appropriated and edited for the purposes of Lollard polemic. The third Oxford determination in defence of biblical translation, for example, has been shown to be a Lollard work based on an orthodox determination by Richard Ullerston, given a Lollard complexion by means of judicious re-writing.²⁵ That seven manuscript copies of this work survive, and that a printed edition was issued early in the Reformation period,²⁶ suggests that copies were in continuous circulation, merely awaiting a change in political circumstances before open publication was possible. Thomson has concluded that throughout the fifteenth century, Lollardy remained more widespread than records would suggest, as earlier persecution had led the movement to be “more concerned with self-preservation than with revolution,”²⁷ and this view is supported by the survival of multiple copies of such works through the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. At least some Lollard texts - and, indeed, texts which may have merely aroused suspicion of Lollardy - may, then, have remained unrecorded throughout the fifteenth century, not through effective suppression, but through the pragmatic necessity for secrecy on the part of their owners.

The existence of a thriving heterodox sub-culture in the mid-fifteenth century, for which vernacular writings fulfilled an important doctrinal function, is attested to in the

²⁵ See Anne Hudson, “Debate on Bible Translation,” pp.1-18. This text has been edited by Curt F. Bühler, “A Lollard Tract: On Translating the Bible into English,” *MAE* 7 (1938): 167-183.

²⁶ The first edition was printed “in the yere of owre lorde M.CCCCC. and. XXX:” Bühler, “Lollard Tract,” p.167.

²⁷ John A.F. Thomson, *The Later Lollards: 1414-1520*. Oxford, 1965.

writings of the controversial Bishop of St. Asaph, Reginald Pecock.²⁸ In his last extant work, *The Book of Faith*, written *circa* 1456,²⁹ Pecock challengingly refutes the case of those who attack the Church:

if this be trewe that thou hast such so stronge and cleer evydencis as thou pretendist and knowlechist thee to have, and bringist hem not forth into open, bi word or bi writing, and therfore overcomest not othere men, and the chirche therbi forto consent and graunte thi party, and forto forsake her errour, thou art in dampnable sinne and schalt be dampned.³⁰

Backed up by the authority of suitable scriptural quotation, the statement appears as an ingenuous call for open debate, in either oral or written form. What Pecock conveniently chooses to overlook, however, is the balance of power which, particularly in the wake of statutes such as *De heretico comburendo* and Arundel's *Constitutions*, would make any holder of heterodox beliefs more than a little wary of stating such beliefs in public or, indeed, writing them down. Nonetheless, we must still suppose that this challenge was addressed to a group of citizens which Pecock knew to exist.

The case of Reginald Pecock, who was ultimately labelled a heretic as a result of his meticulously reasoned support of the existing institution of the Church, has been described as the "exception to the general rule of unreasoning polemic against the Lollards in the vernacular."³¹ However, whilst Pecock was undeniably a singular figure, his career provides a telling commentary upon the response of the Church to religious discussion in the vernacular, to which I will now turn. Pecock, unlike his predecessors in the fight against Lollardy, realized that

²⁸ On Pecock, see V.H.H. Green, *Bishop Reginald Pecock: A Study in Ecclesiastical History and Thought* (Cambridge, 1945); Wendy Scase, "Reginald Pecock," in *Authors of the Middle Ages 3*, ed. M.C. Seymour (Aldershot, 1996), pp.75-146.

²⁹ For a chronology of Pecock's works, see Charles W. Brockwell, Jr., *Bishop Reginald Pecock and the Lancastrian Church: Securing the Foundations of Cultural Authority* (Lewiston, New York, 1985), pp.x-xii.

³⁰ Pecock, *Book of Faith*, p.201.

³¹ Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, p.440.

Forto conuicte and ouercome tho seid erring persones of the lay peple, and for to make hem leve her errouris, an excellent remedie is the dryuyng of hem into sure knowing or into weenyng or opinioun, that thei neden miche more to leerne and knowe into the profit and sure leernyng and knowing of Goddis lawe and seruice, than what thei mowe leerne and knowe bi her reeding and studyng in the Bible oonli.³²

If this corrective aim were to be fulfilled, it could only be achieved by addressing the erring laity “in her modris langage.”³³ Whilst Pecock chooses not to pursue the matter of lay Bible reading, his insistence upon the necessity of a body of instructional literature which goes beyond “reeding and studyng of the Bible oonli” implies an awareness that his readers are likely to have access to a vernacular Bible: his works are intended as a supplement to reading already being undertaken, in order to maintain ecclesiastical control over devotional practices. Unlike Trevisa, he sees no reason to justify or condemn Biblical translation - it is tacitly accepted that an English Bible already exists and, regardless of the academic rights and wrongs, it is Pecock’s pragmatic aim to reassert ecclesiastical authority over those already in possession of the Word of God.³⁴

Although Pecock is today most widely cited for his meticulous vernacular arguments against Lollardy - particularly in *The Repressor* - his extensive literary output, in both Latin and English, was aimed not only at Lollards. As Brockwell has observed,

Reginald Pecock wrote not only to refute Lollards but also to educate loyal Catholics, especially those intelligent and increasingly articulate laymen whose education was non-ecclesiastical and in many ways superior to that of the average priest.³⁵

³² Reginald Pecock, *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of Clergy*, 2 vols., ed. Churchill Babington (London, 1860), p.128.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.128. This is in contrast, for example, to the voluminous *Doctrinale* of the Carmelite Thomas Netter of Walden, confessor to Henry V and Henry VI, which argues against Lollardy at great length in Latin.

³⁴ I find Green’s claim, that the opinion attributed to the Lollards by Pecock - that Biblical translation is “a meritorie vertuose moral deede forto therbi deserue grace and glorie” (Pecock, *Repressor*, p.119) - is in fact Pecock’s own, to be unsupportable. Nonetheless, his argument that Pecock had access to the second Wycliffite version of the Bible is persuasive: V.H.H. Green, “Bishop Pecock and the English Bible,” *CQR* 129 (1940): 281-295,

³⁵ Brockwell, *Pecock and the Lancastrian Church*, p.xiv.

This, of course, addresses precisely the same problem as the *Constitutions*, with the important distinction being that Arundel's answer to heresy, to use Hudson's words,

was not to be a reasoned argument for its rejection, but a suppression of all discussion of theological or ecclesiastical issues, tending to heresy or not.³⁶

The important point about Pecock, then, is his unprecedented acceptance of the existence of an intelligent and self-aware laity, realising that it was no use trying merely to suppress discussion. Nor was it useful to counter Lollard arguments in Latin in the manner of Netter's *Doctrinale*. For one thing, as has been noted above, the authoritative text *par excellence* - the Bible - was already circulating in English and, more obviously, the majority of these "intelligent and increasingly articulate laymen" would not understand the Latin anyway. Consequently, Pecock sought to provide no less than a complete system of vernacular religious instruction for the laity which would provide all that was necessary "to ech mannys good lyvyng,"³⁷ a purpose which is elaborated throughout the *Reule* and all his subsequent, inter-connected works.³⁸ Pecock describes the inter-relationship of his works in a rather colourful metaphor, in terms of the diverse chambers and parlours which cleave to a great hall and, when taken together, form "oon semely, beuteful, esiful and comfortable habitacioun."³⁹ We may perhaps recognise here the influence of earlier allegorical buildings,⁴⁰ although it is interesting to note that Pecock describes this ideal dwelling for the

³⁶ Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, p.431.

³⁷ Reginald Pecock, *The Reule of Crysten Religioun*, ed. William Cabell Greet (reprint, Oxford, 1971), p.1. Pecock was not oblivious to the apparent presumptuousness of this aim, conceding that such grandiose claims "mow be takun as for wordis of veyn glorie or of pryde and of presumpcioun vpon my silf" - a charge which he strenuously denied: Reginald Pecock, *The Donet edited and collated with The Poore Mennis Myrrour*, ed. Elsie Vaughan Hitchcock (London, 1921), p.81.

³⁸ For a detailed study of Pecock's proposed "new Christian curriculum," see Brockwell, *Pecock and the Lancastrian Church*, pp.57-92.

³⁹ Pecock, *Reule*, p.22.

⁴⁰ See above, chapter Three.

Christian as being constructed from devotional texts - naturally, Pecock's own.⁴¹

As well as proclaiming clearly his intention, Pecock was equally definite concerning the methods he would employ:

I have spoke oft tyme, and bi long leiser, with the wittiest and kunnyngist men of thilk seid soort (i.e. the Lollards), contrarie to the chirche, and which han be holde as dukis amonge hem, and which han loved me for that y wolde pacientli heere her evydencis, and her motyves, without exprobacioun. And verrili noon of hem couthe make eny motyve for her parti so stronge as y my silf couthe have made therto.⁴²

Whether we take this statement at face value, or suspect that Pecock may have invented his victories against the "wittiest and kunnyngist" Lollards in order to bolster his arguments, is rather beside the point:⁴³ what is important here is that it sets down his proposed method for correction - the use of reason (although it should be noted that "fier and swerd or hangement"⁴⁴ were not to be ruled out completely if persuasion failed). Indeed, the "doom of reason" (which may be understood as "moral lawe of kinde, which is lawe of God"⁴⁵) is at the centre of Pecock's system of doctrinal persuasion, and would prove to be one of the largest sticks with which he was beaten by his detractors.

It is important to note that the means by which Pecock envisaged his reasoned arguments circulating were, at root, explicitly textual. Constantly cross-referencing his many

⁴¹ It is possible that Pecock may here be alluding to earlier comparisons of study with architectural construction, although he does not explore the full allegorical potential of the image. On the allegorical tradition, see Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1990), pp.43-44.

⁴² Pecock, *Book of Faith*, p.202.

⁴³ For Pecock's social and business relationships with the Mercers' Company and others whilst master of Whittington College, see Scase, "Reginald Pecock", pp.89-90. However, whilst we may establish a social *milieu* for Pecock, we cannot with certainty establish a precise audience for his works. In *The Folewer to the Donet*, for example, Pecock claims that an earlier work had been "scornyd and reprouyd" by mercers' servants. Whilst this may have been true, it is not inconceivable that these detracting figures are employed merely as a rhetorical device, in the manner of Trevisa's Clerk discussed above: Reginald Pecock, *The Folewer to the Donet*, ed. Elsie Vaughan Hitchcock (reprint, Oxford, 1971), pp.176-177. This insubstantial nature of Pecock's claims regarding his audience is touched upon in Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, p.56.

⁴⁴ Pecock, *Book of Faith*, p.139.

⁴⁵ Pecock, *Repressor*, p.6.

works, the purpose of which he describes as “like causes for whiche clerkis prechen þe maters of þese seid bookis to þe peple in her comoun langage,”⁴⁶ he nonetheless emphasises the supremacy of the written word, for

preching to þe peple...schal neuer take his parfite effect, neiþer in ȝeuyng to þe peple sufficient and stable doctryne neiþer in prentying into hem abiding deuocioun, wipoute þat þe peple haue at hem silf in writing which þei mowe ofte rede or heere oft rad þe substancial poyntis and trouþis whiche ben to hem to be prechid bi mouþe.⁴⁷

Whilst his main thrust is towards the literate Lollards who, with typical self-importance, he claims, “han hungrid and thirstid, forto have hadde the copie and the contynuel uce of tho bokis to hem, as moche as ever thei hungriden and thirstiden aftir mete and drinke,”⁴⁸ he remains aware that the laity cannot be addressed as one homogeneous mass, but fill a broad spectrum of intellectual levels. Those who are “so lowȝe and symple in witt, leernyng and kunnyng,” must rely upon those who they believe to be “vnbigileable [incorruptible] techers, enformers and affermers,”⁴⁹ and if they fail due to clerical shortcomings, “god wole hem holde excusid.”⁵⁰ Indeed, he clearly states that different works are pitched at different educational levels, and that different readers will have a more or less sophisticated understanding of his works:

[P]arauenture summe men wolen seie þat in þis present book, and in “þe book of cristen religioun,” and in opire bookis whiche y write for lay men, y write maters passyng þe capacite and þe power of lay men forto þo maters vndirstonde; wherto y seie þus of certeynte: þat þei passen not ech lay mannys power which hap assaied hem eer þis day to hem leerne and vndirstonde, how euer fewe lay men haue redde and studied in hem afore þis present day. And ȝit y meene not of suche lay men whiche schulden mowe leerne and vndirstonde þo writyngis if þei weren maad in latyn, but of þo lay men whiche kouþe not studie and undirstonde hem if þei were

⁴⁶ Pecock, *Reule*, p.19.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.20.

⁴⁸ Pecock, *Book of Faith*, p.206. In this metaphor of consumption, we are reminded of those who, says Langland, “gnawen God with the gorge whanne hir guttes fullen:” *PPL.*, B X l.57. However, whilst Langland condemns this practice, Pecock acknowledges the situation and offers what he considers to be acceptable fare.

⁴⁹ Pecock, *Folewer*, p.34.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.34. See also *Book of Faith*, pp.223-224.

He goes on to use the illustrative example of the Latin Bible, which “in many of his parties passip þe capacite and þe power of ful many grete clerkis and of grete and kunnyng doctouris,”⁵² but which should still be read by clerics for the benefit and understanding which they may receive. It should be noted that in making this comparison, Pecock clearly defines his own works as being for the benefit of the laity and the Bible as the domain of the clergy.⁵³ Whilst he appends the observation that it is morally healthy for the laity to be baffled by some theological complexity in order to retain an appropriate humility, the example nonetheless hints that both clergy and laity may be of greatly differing abilities and that, in intellectual terms, some laymen outstrip some clerics.

These intellectual equivalences notwithstanding, there is no suggestion whatsoever that they should affect the hierarchical relationship between clergy and laity in any way. Indeed, although Pecock recognised the existence of a literate and articulate laity,⁵⁴ his anti-Lollard defence of forms of lay piety which do not depend on literacy is particularly strong. Green has asserted the value of *The Repressor*’s contribution to our understanding of Lollard attitudes towards pilgrimage, but we should not overlook the fact that what *The Repressor* tells us about pilgrimage is , first and foremost, Pecock’s own view.

We have seen that discussions of pilgrimage brought forth extreme opinions, both *pro* and *contra*,⁵⁵ but few argued in favour of such observances at such great length as Pecock. With extensive arguments supported both by scriptural authority and the “doom of reason,”

⁵¹ Pecock, *Folewer*, p.7.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁵³ See above, p.191.

⁵⁴ Brockwell has noted the recurrence of the lay interrogator, either fictional or actual, as a recurrent motif throughout Pecock’s works: Brockwell, *Pecock and the Lancastrian Church*, p.22.

⁵⁵ See chapter Five above.

he asserts that pilgrimage is a “merytorie deede forto it ensauple to othere.”⁵⁶ What is particularly striking about Pecock’s discussion, however, is that metaphorical interpretations of pilgrimage are firmly avoided - it is decidedly “a bodili going or a bodili remouyng fro oon place into an other.”⁵⁷ Pilgrimage is thus defined as an active, rather than contemplative, form of devotion, which requires the affective, rather than intellectual, participation of the laity.

The same emphasis upon affective lay devotional practices may be discerned in Pecock’s associated views on images. As one may expect, images are promoted as the books of the unlearned laity, providing teaching for “alle tho persounes whiche kunnen not rede in bokis.”⁵⁸ Further to this traditional role of images as a substitute for the written word in cases of necessity, Pecock expresses the surprising opinion that, even for the literate, images may be more effective than books. When contemplating the life of a saint, for example,

certis thouȝ (a man) couthe rede in a book the storie therof, ȝit he schulde rede vj. or vij. or mo leeuys in the book, eer he schulde bringe into knowing or into remembraunce so myche as he may knowe and remembre ther of in a litil and myche lasse while bi siȝt of the iȝe in biholding an ymage coruen with purtenancis sett aboute him, or in biholding a storie openli ther of purtreied or peintid in the wal or in a clooth.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Pecock, *Repressor*, p.190.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.176. This is, as one would expect in an expressly anti-Lollard work, in direct opposition to the Lollard view expressed by William Thorpe that the only legitimate pilgrimage was the metaphorical pilgrimage of the good life “towards the bliss of heaven.” Sumption, *Pilgrimage*, p.300.

⁵⁸ Pecock, *Repressor*, p.213. The notion of images as books for the unlettered may be traced to Gregory the Great’s letter of 600 to Bishop Serenus of Marseilles, in which he stated that “what writing makes present to those reading, the same picturing makes present to the uneducated, to those perceiving visually, because in it the ignorant see what they ought to follow, in it they read who do not know letters. Wherefore, and especially for the common people, picturing is the equivalent of reading:” quoted in Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, p.222. Aston has noted that the growth of image-based devotion in the medieval period was largely popular in impetus, but that the Church responded by incorporating the phenomenon into the structured discipline of devotional practices: Margaret Aston, *England’s Iconoclasts* vol.1 (Oxford, 1988), p.22.

⁵⁹ Pecock, *Repressor*, p.212. A further example is made of the pilgrimage to St. Catherine’s College, London, which is said to have more effect on the city’s devotion than if there had been “x. thousind mo bokis writun in Londoun in thilk day of the same Seintis lijf and passioun:” *Ibid.*, p.215.

Such vigorous support for devotional practices of a non-textual nature seems, at first sight, to sit uneasily within Pecock's *œuvre*, which is in itself so dependent upon written argument and instruction. This apparent inconsistency, however, serves to reinforce our sense of historical context. Pilgrimages and images were still the officially sanctioned devotional expressions of the laity;⁶⁰ it was only when the layman stepped outside his prescribed sphere in order to engage in doctrinal debate that written arguments became necessary.⁶¹

With this necessity in mind, the ultimate programme envisaged by Pecock was

a schort compendiose logik...for al the comoun peple in her modiris langage...into whos making, if God wole graunte leue and leyser, y purpose sumtyme aftir myn othere bisynessis forto assaie.⁶²

As far as surviving works and records suggest, this project was to remain unfulfilled. In his earliest vernacular work, *The Reule of Crysten Religioun*, Pecock had effectively set an agenda for the study of his works:

it schal be riȝt profitable þat þis book...schulde be taken of alle þi cristen peple into vse of ful bisy, ech day studiyng, leernyng and comunyng and afterward þerupon remembring.⁶³

Whilst this insistence upon close and repeated reading and meditation was reiterated throughout successive works,⁶⁴ he was nonetheless acutely aware of the shortcomings of the English vernacular as a medium for doctrinal education. Vernacular theology had become

⁶⁰ It should be noted that although lay access to images is promoted by Pecock, he is keen to stress that their proliferation should be kept under control: *Ibid.*, pp.183-4.

⁶¹ For the Lollard argument that images merely distract the viewer and cause him to "with-drawen his deuocion and dusken his herte," see *Crede*, ll.560-565.

⁶² Pecock, *Repressor*, p.9.

⁶³ Pecock, *Reule*, p.13.

⁶⁴ By the time of his *Book of Faith*, Pecock was able to list eleven works by name, "with summe othere mo," which, "if ȝe wolen rede diligentli, and attende therto studioseli, and be wel acqueyntid with hem, and not forto take an hasti smel or smatche in hem, and soone leie hem aside, ȝe schulen fynde in hem so greet witt, and leernyng of Cristen religioun, that ȝe schulen holde ȝou bigilid in the trust which ȝe had bfore in ȝoure othere studies, and laboris for leernyng:" Pecock, *Book of Faith*, p.205. See also *Ibid.*, pp.116-117.

an unavoidable fact of the fifteenth century, but the language had still to forge a new vocabulary in order to articulate the complexities of doctrinal thought, and to develop the grammatical precision which had made Latin the ideal vehicle for the expression of immutable truth.⁶⁵ Consequently, to Trevisa's rhetorical question - "what hap Englysch trespased þat (the Bible) myȝt noȝt be translated into Englysch?"⁶⁶ - Pecoock provides the answer:

Langagis, whos reulis ben not writen, as ben Englisch, Freensch, and manye othere, ben chaunged withynne ȝeeris and cuntrees, that oon man of the oon cuntre, and of the oon tyme, myȝte not, or schulde not kunne undirstonde a man of the othere kuntre, and of the othere tyme; and al for this, that the seid langagis ben not stabili and fundamentali writen.⁶⁷

There is an awareness that circumstances have forced Pecoock to write in a language which is more mutable than the monumental Latin of scholarly discourse. Furthermore, the assertion that the vernacular is not "fundamentali writen" may be interpreted as a deliberate attempt to subvert Lollard claims to a religious life "grounded" in the vernacular Bible.⁶⁸

The most notable result of this linguistic self-consciousness is the circumlocutory style which, whilst undoubtedly off-putting to most modern readers, was deemed necessary in order to convey information on contentious doctrinal issues as precisely as possible in a

⁶⁵ These shortcomings of the vernacular were emphasised by Thomas Palmer in his contribution to the Oxford debate on biblical translation in order to argue for the impossibility of such an undertaking: Deanesly, *Lollard Bible*, pp.426-428. Palmer's argument, that "error is... an inevitable result of translation into a barbarous tongue like English," is summarised in Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change," pp.842-843.

⁶⁶ Trevisa, *Dialogue*, p.218. As noted above (p.187, n.18) Trevisa's line of argument had also been employed by Ullerston and, in turn, by Lollard polemicists who, faced with a history of translation from Hebrew into Greek, Latin and numerous European vernaculars, demanded to know "how not now as well auȝte it to be allowed a man to rede þe Gospel on Engliche and do þer-after:" Bühler, "Lollard Tract," p.173.

⁶⁷ Pecoock, *Book of Faith*, p.251. This instability of the English language in the period under consideration is neatly highlighted in Caxton's prologue to his 1460 edition of Trevisa's translation of the *Polychronicon*, in which he states that he has somewhat changed "the rude and old englyssh / that is to wete certayn wordes / which in these dayes be neither vsyd ne vnderstanden:" Caxton, *Prologues and Epilogues*, p.68. The notion of language changing over the course of time occurs also in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, bk. 2, ll. 22-28, although here the assertion that "in forme of speche is chaunge" is more specifically associated with translation "out of Latyn" (*ibid.*, l.14) into the vernacular.

⁶⁸ Hudson has defined the oft-used Lollard term "ground" as "establish as deriving from the bible;" an absolute usage which derives from the Latin *fundatus*: Hudson, "Lollard Sect Vocabulary," p.172.

language without established rules.⁶⁹ We have seen how Langland's orthodox *Piers Plowman*, because of its expression in the vernacular, had itself become "unruly" through the interpretations of subsequent readers and writers. It is unsurprising, then, that Pecock should adopt such a pedantic style when addressing an audience which he knew to contain Lollards, who through their manipulation of the vernacular had appropriated *Piers* for their own. It should also be remembered that legislation in the early fifteenth century had increased the importance of clearly establishing one's unequivocal orthodoxy - a further concern which no doubt had a strong bearing on Pecock's writing.

In expressing the need for the broad circulation of his books in order to combat error, Pecock specifically states that "prelatis and othere myȝty men of good" should cause "seid bokis to be writun in greet multitude, and to be *wel correctid*" (my italics) before being distributed "where nede is trowid to be."⁷⁰ This express concern with correction and revision is used to rebuff detractors in *The Donet*, in which it is stated that earlier works which have drawn suspicion were circulated through "vncurtisie and vndiscrecioun of freendis," who allowed copies to be made before "þei were bettir examyned of me and approvid of my lordis and fadris of þe church."⁷¹ This disowning of works which had not been "correctid" was to be mobilised, albeit unsuccessfully, in his trial, as he attempted to dissociate himself from uncorrected works written before the preceding three years.⁷²

The problems thus arising from the unsupervised circulation of texts raises the question: if Pecock's words could be so misinterpreted, how much more dangerous would it then be to allow the laity access to the Bible? The threat to ecclesiastical unity which

⁶⁹ On Pecock's "definite, dry, dull but crystal-clear English prose," see Green, *Pecock*, pp.189-193.

⁷⁰ Pecock, *Book of Faith*, p.117.

⁷¹ Pecock, *Donet*, p.7.

⁷² Green, *Pecock*, p.49.

would be posed by such free availability is addressed in *The Repressor*, when Pecock warns “al the world” thus:

If substanciali leerned clerkis in logik and in moral philosophie and in dyvynyte, and ripeli exercisid ther yn, weren not and schulden not be forto wiseli and dewli 3eue trewe vndirstondingis and exposiciouns to textis of Holi Scripture: or ellis, thou3 suche clerkis ben, and the lay parti wolen not attende to the doctrine, whiche tho clerkis mowe and wolen (bi proof of sufficient and open euydence) mynstre to the lay parti; but the lay parti wolen attende and truste to her owne wittis, and wolen lene to textis of the Bible oonli, y dare weel seie so many dyuerse opinions schulden rise in lay mennys wittis bi occasioun of textis in Holy Scripture aboute mennys moral conuersacioun, that al the world schulde be cumbrid therwith, and men schulden accorde to gidere in keping her seruice to God, as doggis doon in a market, whanne ech of hem terith otheris coot.⁷³

For Pecock, supervision of interpretation was of paramount importance, and this must be undertaken by “substanciali leerned clerkis” - none, one may assume, more “substanciali leerned” than Pecock himself.⁷⁴ Indeed, not only does he repeatedly recommend his own works for the doctrinal illumination of the laity, but furthermore states that if further clarification be needed, “recours may be had to my persoon forto aske of me, while y am in þis lijf.”⁷⁵

Whilst emphasising the vital role of the clergy in the doctrinal supervision of the laity, however, Pecock’s awareness of an intelligent audience would not allow him to duck the issue of clerical imperfection, for an avoidance of the realities of the fallible nature of the clergy would undermine his own arguments. So, even in composing his most comprehensive defense of the clergy, *The Repressor*, he was bound by social realities to conclude his expository prologue with the caveat:

alle othere gouernauncis of the clergie, for whiche the clergy is worthi to be blamed in brotherly and nei3bourly correpcioun, y schal not be aboute to excuse neither defende; but preie, speke, and write in al pacience and doctrine, that the clergie

⁷³ Pecock, *Repressor*, pp.85-6.

⁷⁴ In this we are reminded of the admonishment of Langland’s Conscience to Lady Mede; that in order to prevent mis-reading, which is the inevitable result of unsupervised biblical study by the unlearned, she should have consulted a “konnyng clerk” who would have been able to reveal the full implications of the text: *PPL.*, B III l.347.

⁷⁵ Pecock, *Donet*, p.5.

forsake hem, leue, and amende.⁷⁶

Pecock was keenly aware of the gulf between the Church as an institution and the necessarily fallible humans who held office, and realised that this was a major component of his intended audience's discontent. Indeed, he makes the commonsense observation that clerics

ben men and not pure aungels, and therfore thei ben suche, and must needis be suche, that han the natural temptatyue wrecchidnessis whiche other men han.⁷⁷

In considering this acceptance of the inevitability of clerical imperfection, it is interesting to note that, in discussing the issue of clerical possessions, Pecock argues against the authenticity of the *Donation of Constantine*,⁷⁸ and states that there have been as many good Christians since the time of Constantine as there were before.⁷⁹ This argument effectively dismisses the commonly held notion of clerical imperfection stemming from the *Donation*,⁸⁰ and puts the emphasis firmly upon individual human responsibility rather than the Church as an institution.⁸¹

It must not be forgotten, however, that the clergy, whether good or bad, are the ordained earthly mediators of the immutable higher truth of the Word of God, and it is important to clarify the nature of the clergy's teaching authority. Brockwell has pointed to what he believes to be an inconsistency across Pecock's works, and has noted that

in *The Repressor* he expressed the conviction that the word of God is not the Bible

⁷⁶ Pecock, *Repressor*, p.4.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.105.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.350-366.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.336-337.

⁸⁰ On the *Donation of Constantine*, see above, pp.74-75.

⁸¹ For an assessment of the originality and implications of Pecock's views on the *Donation of Constantine*, see Joseph M. Levine, *Humanism and History: Origins of Modern English Historiography* (London, 1987), pp.60-66.

alone.⁸² But in his last work, *Book of Faith*, he wrote at length about the primacy of scripture. So the question arises - what was the nature of the teaching authority of the church?⁸³

As may be seen above, Pecock did not consider the two viewpoints to be mutually exclusive. The clergy may fulfil an essential guiding role, necessary for the proper understanding of Holy Writ, but nevertheless Holy Scripture must provide the foundation of all teaching. For, even in *The Repressor*, the expressed purpose of which was specifically to refute the Lollard “Bible men” by employing the “doom of resoun,”⁸⁴ he conceded that

noon article of feith mai be groundid in doom of resoun sufficientli; neither into his finding, leorning, and knowing mannys resoun bi it silf and bi natural help may rise and suffice, withoute therto maad reuelacioun or affirmyng fro God.⁸⁵

And just as it is the duty of the clergy to teach the laity, so is it the layman’s duty to obey the Church in all its tenets, even if reason would suggest that the Church erred.⁸⁶ Indeed, although it is conceded that inappropriate candidates may sometimes attain clerical preferment,⁸⁷ in order to “lyue anentis god obediently,” one must not only “loue god moost of alle, and oure neiȝbore as vs silf,” but also

honoure þe newe preesthode sette forþ in his churche of þe newe lawe; and forto heere þe preestys þerof, and to receyve goddis loore and sacramentis of hem; and forto obeie to hem.⁸⁸

Such unconditional support for the ecclesiastical *status quo* adds credence to Pecock’s frequently expressed intention to avoid “eny conclusioun which is aȝens treuþe and specialy

⁸² Cf. Pecock, *Repressor*, p.274.

⁸³ Brockwell, *Pecock and the Lancastrian Church*, p.42.

⁸⁴ Pecock, *Repressor*, p.85.

⁸⁵ Pecock, *Repressor*, pp.37-38.

⁸⁶ Pecock, *Book of Faith*, p.209.

⁸⁷ Pecock, *Repressor*, pp.331 & 431-2. Pecock’s criticism of the appointment to office of “children...men wantounli brouȝt up in court, (and) vnleerned men” recalls the similar indignity towards inappropriate candidates for advancement expressed in *Crede*, ll.744-753.

⁸⁸ Pecock, *Donet*, p.39.

a3ens þe feiþ of oure lord god,” and to be corrected if he should perchance fall into error.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, when brought to trial in 1457, there was no question of correction; either he was to abjure or be handed over to the secular arm for burning. Whilst his decision to abjure has in the past been taken for lack of conviction, or even cowardice, more recently it has been seen to comply with his unshakable belief that, in the final analysis, the Church must always be obeyed.⁹⁰ Indeed, the most puzzling aspect of the case is not Pecock’s abjuration, but the severity with which the case was pursued.

The harshness of the condemnation of Pecock by his detractors is, given the evidence of his surviving works, difficult to understand, and there is scant evidence extant with which to support many of the charges to which he confessed. Of the several surviving accounts of his recantation, in spite of some differences, all contain two important points; “that the Church could err in matters of faith and that Christians need not hold to the determinations on matters of faith of a general council of the Church.”⁹¹ Of the first point, Pecock may, by selective reading, be accused. Addressing the assumed Lollard reader, the need for obedience is unquestioned even if the Church is in error:

no man may seie but that the chirche, so longe tyme and ever laboring, and avising
forto come into treuthe, is excusid or were excusid, thou3 it were so that the
chirche, bi ignoraunce, and bi such unpower as is nowe be spokun of, erre.⁹²

This is because the Church, by its very nature, is pleasing to God and must, therefore, as we have seen, command the obedience of all. Pecock’s discussion, however, remains conditional: *if* the Church were in error, *then* it should still be excused. In spite of the

⁸⁹ Pecock, *Reule*, p.29. See also *Donet*, pp.3-4; *Book of Faith*, pp.210-211. For rather less convincing statements of willingness to submit to correction, see *Crede*, ll.840-845; *Plowman’s Tale*, l.1377.

⁹⁰ For an overview of the interpretations which have been placed upon Pecock, see Charles W. Brockwell, Jr., “The Historical Career of Bishop Reginald Pecock, D.D.: The Poore Scoleris Myrrour or a Case Study in Famous Obscurity,” *HTR* 74 (1981): 177-207.

⁹¹ Scase, “Reginald Pecock,” pp.110-111. Other charges, appearing in manuscript records of the proceedings with varying degrees of frequency, are related to errors concerning the Apostles’ Creed.

⁹² Pecock, *Book of Faith*, p.207.

concession that there are bad clerics, there is no statement of actual error in the contemporary Church itself.

For the suggestion that the individual need not hold to the tenets of belief prescribed by the Church, we should turn once more to the “doom of reason.” In opening his condemnation of *The Repressor, Gladius Salomonis*, the Augustinian friar John Bury summarised what he believed to be Pecock’s opinion, not only in Pecock’s words but also in his own language (“in suo vulgari”), in order to avoid charges of misrepresentation:⁹³

It longyth not to Holy Scripture, neither it is his part, for to grounde ony gouernaunce, or dede or seruyse of God, or any lawe of God, or ony trovthe whiche mannys resoone be nature may fynde, lerne, or knowe.⁹⁴

What this assessment fails to take into account, however, is that in Pecock’s terms, “oure feip is in oure resoun.”⁹⁵ That which is considered to be man’s reason includes the truths which are affirmed purely by God’s direct revelation.⁹⁶ Such an understanding of reason effectively counters Lollard arguments against all ecclesiastical practices not specifically grounded in scripture, but without denigrating the Bible itself, for

alle opire...bookis fecchen her autorite fro oon of þese two now seid bookis, þe bible and doom of resoun, and ellis þo opire bookis hadden noon autorite.⁹⁷

It is reasonable to assume that, in a case of such seriousness, Pecock’s works were examined very closely. If, therefore, these charges of antisacerdotal rationalism are, upon close inspection, shown to be unfounded, we must look elsewhere for the reasons behind Pecock’s arraignment. Green has pointed out that amongst the twenty-four doctors appointed to inspect Pecock’s works, several were personal enemies, and that he may well

⁹³ Excerpts from *Gladius Salomonis* printed as an appendix to Pecock, *Repressor*, p.573.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.575.

⁹⁵ Pecock, *Reule*, p.425.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.426.

⁹⁷ Pecock, *Folewer*, p.10.

have created further enmity amongst his judges by his request to be judged by his intellectual equals, rather than his fellow bishops.⁹⁸ Scase has recently argued for more broadly political motives for the case, suggesting that Pecock's trial for heresy was an effective way of asserting royal authority over the Church, the case being used as an "exemplary display of the correction and deprivation of the clergy."⁹⁹ A letter of September 1458 from Thomas Lowe and Robert Stillington to the King contends that

the dampnable doctrine and pestifed secte of Reynold Pecok excedethe in malice
and horribilite all othre heresies and sectis of heretikis to vs herbefor knowen by
hering or writing¹⁰⁰

Whilst Scase's suggestion is convincing, it rather plays down the interest on the part of the ecclesiastical authorities in silencing Pecock that is indicated by such letters and Bury's rather weighted charges. The use of the phrase "pestifed secte" itself places the accusations firmly within the contest for spiritual authority; "sect" being a much-used pejorative term in Lollard discourse,¹⁰¹ which is here being mobilized against a perceived Lollard standpoint.¹⁰² Rather than merely supporting the royal agenda, the "reformist rectors and conservative members of religious orders"¹⁰³ had their own reasons for attacking Pecock.

We have seen that the charges concerning the authority of the Church required a selective approach to the evidence, which perhaps suggests another, unstated motive for the case. Brockwell has pointed to the nature of this motive, in stating that Pecock's offense

⁹⁸ Green, Pecock. In spite of occasional disclaimers, this arrogance, which also permeates Pecock's written works, can have won him few friends. See, for example, Pecock, *Book of Faith*, pp.204-207.

⁹⁹ Scase, "Reginald Pecock," p.116.

¹⁰⁰ The letter is transcribed in Scase, "Reginald Pecock," pp.134-137.

¹⁰¹ Hudson, "Lollard Sect Vocabulary," p.171 and n.31.

¹⁰² On "reverse discourses" in the contest between orthodoxy and Lollardy, see Barr, *Signes and Sothe*, chapter Four, especially pp.98-99.

¹⁰³ Scase, "Reginald Pecock," p.117.

was essentially that he was “too original in his defense of the *status quo*.”¹⁰⁴ The originality which presented the most direct challenge to the Church, however, was less to do with his perceived reliance upon the “doom of reason” than it was the medium in which he expressed his arguments: the English vernacular.

In addressing and refuting the Lollards on their own terms, in their own language, Pecock had, of necessity, “borrowed from the modes of discourse current among the anticlericals and heretics,” circulating theological and polemical writings amongst the laity.¹⁰⁵ In producing a self-contained Christian curriculum for the laity, supported by vernacular quotation from scripture and the Fathers,¹⁰⁶ he was, in effect, subverting his own intentions of buttressing doctrinal orthodoxy, by by-passing the need for a pedagogic clergy. Furthermore, I would suggest that in making use of these forms of discourse, he was according to them status and validity which the institution of the Church was not prepared to accept.

In arraigning Pecock, the Church showed itself unwilling to face the fact that the discourse of devotion was no longer solely its domain. At his public recantation in December 1457, Pecock repeated the substance of his Latin abjuration in English, although his heresies were itemised in Latin, as Scase has surmised, “presumably for reasons of safety.”¹⁰⁷ Whilst fear of further spreading heretical notions is one possible reason, it is surely equally possible that it is a further expression of the draconian measures taken to delineate the institutionally approved uses for the vernacular.

¹⁰⁴ Brockwell, *Pecock and the Lancastrian Church*, p.162.

¹⁰⁵ Scase, “Reginald Pecock,” p.117.

¹⁰⁶ On Pecock’s possible usage of the Wycliffite Bible, see Green, “Pecock and the English Bible,” pp.281-295. For Patristic and other literary sources employed by Pecock, see Brockwell, *Pecock and the Lancastrian Church*, pp.226-228, n.146.

¹⁰⁷ Scase, “Reginald Pecock,” pp.109-110

The persistence of Lollardy throughout the fifteenth century, albeit as a necessarily clandestine movement, demonstrates that Arundel's *Constitutions* had failed effectively to stem lay religious autonomy. Pecock's more realistic response to the problem, however, had paradoxically empowered the heterodox lay party's position in the post-*Constitutions* social environment. He therefore had to be silenced very publicly by a Church which had failed to respond to changes in society which were taking place at a pace which it refused to acknowledge. By engaging with the Lollards in particular, and with the laity at large, in the "unruly" medium of the vernacular, Pecock was himself unintentionally contributing to the legitimacy of doctrinal discussion beyond the prescribed clerical sphere.

It is significant that even in his eventual confinement in Thorney Abbey, Pecock was not only denied visitors, unless authorised by the king or archbishop, but was also forbidden writing materials.¹⁰⁸ Even in the wake of the Church's apparent victory, the threat of the pen remained very real in a cultural environment in which the clergy could no longer realistically claim exclusive possession of the Word.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.116.

CONCLUSION

Nemo mittens manum suam ad aratrum, et respiciens retro, aptus est regno Dei.

[No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.]¹

Christ's stern words to those who would procrastinate before honouring their promises of devotion were, as Barney has noted, eagerly applied by the Church to its own particular offices of preaching and the sacramental conveyance of grace.² Whilst Luke 10 indeed opens with the ordination of apostolic preaching duties, however, the verse cited applies more generally to the Christian community as a whole: it is an exhortation to spiritual diligence, the specific implications of which are largely dependent upon the status of the individual being addressed.

As we have seen,³ the late-medieval Church, largely through the agency of the newly established fraternal Orders, pointedly addressed this issue of Christian practice in a two-fold programme of increased clerical responsibility and a concomitant promotion of lay piety. Enshrined in the decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council and subsequent legislation at a diocesan level, this programme was carried out by an increase in preaching, which brought the Word of God to the laity in their "mother tongue" to an unprecedented extent, and emphasised the responsibility which the individual Christian must take for acting in accordance with the divine will. Institutionally, of course, a strict hierarchy remained in place: to continue with the agricultural metaphor, for example, it was the duty of all to employ the "ploughshare of confession," but the "ploughshare of the tongue" - the preaching of God's Word - remained the instrument of the ordained clergy alone.

¹ Luke 9.62.

² Barney, "The Plowshare of the Tongue," p.266.

³ See chapter One above.

In England in the fourteenth century, however, hierarchies were under threat, and none more so than in the area in which all other conflicts were expressed; language itself. The English language was re-asserting itself over French, which had been the higher status vernacular since the Norman conquest. In order to carry out the Church's extensive pastoral programme in this cultural context of linguistic realignment, it was necessary to circulate pastoral manuals and other devotional materials - hitherto composed almost exclusively in the more authoritative Latin - in the English vernacular. In such a manner were clerics with little Latin equipped with the means to carry out their extensive pastoral duties.

It would appear that the Church did not foresee a potential threat to its position of doctrinal authority in the production of vernacular texts dealing with theological matters. However, the availability of such texts inadvertently facilitated direct access to complex doctrinal issues to anyone, cleric or lay, with the ability to read English, thereby calling into question the need for the clergy as mediators between the Word of God and the laity. Furthermore, the wider circulation of these works allowed orthodox texts to be appropriated and (mis-)interpreted in order to attack the very institution by which they had been generated: this, as we have seen in the main body of the present thesis, is nowhere more evident than in fourteenth- to sixteenth-century responses to *Piers Plowman*.

I have argued that, rather than being intended for a "variegated" audience of clerics and laymen,⁴ as is widely believed, *Piers Plowman* was written solely for a clerical audience. However, Langland's use of the vernacular facilitated the movement of his work from the clerical reading community for which it had been intended into a wider, un-regulated reading community. Once adopted by this new and unforeseen readership, the text itself ceased to be constrained by the interpretative traditions which had informed Langland's creation. It thereby soon became an adaptable tool for the questioning of religious and, to a lesser

⁴ Burrow, "The Audience of *Piers Plowman*," p.374.

extent, social hierarchies throughout the pre-Reformation period.

In works such as *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* and *The Plowman's Tale*, we have observed extreme examples of how the orthodox figure of the ploughman, freed from its allegorical context by its removal from a specifically clerical discourse, could be employed as a vernacular authority against the Church's ordained preachers who had once claimed Christ's exhortation to diligent husbandry for their own.⁵ Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that so effective was this adoption by dissenters, that it was thought advisable to remove references to the figure from orthodox works.⁶ Such evidence within the present thesis, however, remains tentative, although further exploration of the fate of common agricultural metaphors in sermon collections of the fifteenth - and, indeed, the sixteenth - century may prove a fruitful avenue of research.

Whilst the notion of a "*Piers Plowman* tradition" is useful in defining a group of works which display considered authorial responses to *Piers Plowman* itself,⁷ we must be careful to avoid excessive rigidity in the application of this term. For example, the threat to the Church is, paradoxically, most clearly observed in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, a work which subtly employs the implications raised by the vernacular currency of the ploughman in a discussion of the contest for authority between clergy and laity, but ultimately rejects a heterodox stance. Although, unlike avowedly Lollard works such as *Crede* and *Mum*, the *Canterbury Tales* upholds the *status quo*, it nonetheless accords highest authority to the officially sanctioned voice of the Church only by lay consent,⁸ and thereby offers a more subtle challenge. That the complexion of the work could be given a decidedly Lollard hue

⁵ See chapter Four and pp.155-160 above.

⁶ See pp.171-173.

⁷ See p.29, n.1.

⁸ See chapter Five.

by the sixteenth-century addition of the spurious *Plowman's Tale* displays the contingent nature of this consent, whilst the citation of *The Canterbury Tales* in a list of suspect books owned by John Baron of Lincoln in the late 1450s would suggest that the vernacular questioning of ecclesiastical authority was, in itself, perceived as threatening, regardless of the conclusion propounded.⁹

As has been noted, the success of early fifteenth-century ecclesiastical legislation aimed at combatting Lollardy was, inevitably, limited: channels for vernacular discussion of antisacerdotal import, once opened, could not be closed. Officially, Latin remained the language of authority, and it was in this form that the repressive statutes, *De heretico comburendo* and Arundel's *Constitutions*, were framed. However, English was the language of change, and attempts by the Church to reclaim doctrinal ground from the vernacular were unsuccessful, as the persistence of Lollardy throughout the fifteenth century makes clear.¹⁰

Maintaining the notion of a linguistic hierarchy with Latin at the head, Reginald Pecock nonetheless confronted the problem of increasing lay devotional autonomy by accepting the status of the vernacular and addressing his putative audience in the "mother tongue." That his efforts were, in turn, condemned as heresy may be taken as evidence of the Church's belated awareness of the threat posed by any doctrinal discussion in English:¹¹ a language "whos reulis ben not writen" which, by its very flexibility, could not be

⁹ The case of John Baron is cited in Deanesly, *Lollard Bible*, p.363. On the adoption of Chaucer in the sixteenth century as a spurious prophet of the Reformation, see Wawn, "Chaucer, *The Plowman's Tale* and Reformation Propaganda," pp.174-192; Thomas J. Heffernan, "Aspects of the Chaucerian Apocrypha: Animadversions on William Thynne's Edition of the *Plowman's Tale*," in *Chaucer Traditions*, ed. Ruth Morse and Barry Windeatt (Cambridge, 1990), pp.158-165.

¹⁰ Although, as Hudson has noted, the Oldcastle rebellion of 1414 "added secular to ecclesiastical disreputability in the concept of reform" (Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, p.421), there is evidence for the persistence of Lollardy throughout the fifteenth century, particularly in the south of England: see Claire Cross, *Church and People 1450-1660: the Triumph of the Laity in the English Church* (Glasgow, 1976), pp. 26-30.

¹¹ Pecock's arraignment was roughly contemporary with the suspicion cast upon John Baron's copy of *The Canterbury Tales* (see above).

constrained by the rules of the Church.¹²

In answer to much recent scholarship on late medieval piety, which has frequently focused upon the “discontents,”¹³ Duffy has put forward a strong case for “a remarkable degree of religious... homogeneity across the social spectrum” in pre-Reformation England.¹⁴ As noted at the beginning of the present thesis, he sees this shared “traditional” religion as having thrived in a cultural environment in which an increasingly educated laity were exposed to devotional materials in their mother tongue. However, as we have seen, the emergence of the vernacular as a medium in which to discuss doctrinal issues had irrevocably altered the position of the laity within “the Church” in its broadest sense.¹⁵ Whilst the late medieval English Christian, regardless of status, may well have continued to “put his hand to the plough,” ownership of the plough, oxen and, indeed, the field had become less secure.

On 18th January 1549, the Bishop of Winchester, Hugh Latimer, preached at St. Paul’s on the topic: who are the ploughers?¹⁶ Invoking Luke 9.62, he went on unequivocally to employ the “ploughshare of the tongue” metaphor and firmly to identify the clergy with ploughmen. It is interesting to note that this martyr of the Reformation, in articulating his prescription for the “commune welth”¹⁷ employs the negative exemplar of the Devil as an evil, yet unstinting ploughman:

¹² See above, pp.189-207.

¹³ I borrow this useful, catch-all term for all religious minorities from Scott L. Waugh and Peter D. Diehl (eds.), *Christendom and its Discontents: Exclusion, Persecution, and Rebellion, 1000-1500* (Cambridge, 1996).

¹⁴ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, p.3.

¹⁵ For an indication of the extent to which doctrinal matters were discussed in the vernacular, see the extensive list of vernacular theologies included as an appendix to Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change,” pp.860-864.

¹⁶ Hugh Latimer, *Sermon on the Ploughers: 18 January 1549*, ed. Edward Arber (London, 1895).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.25. The phrase is repeated on p.29.

the diligenteste preacher in all the Realme, he is euer at his ploughe, no lordynge
nor loytringe can hynder hym, he is euer applynge his busynes, ye shal neuer fynde
hym idle I warraunte you.¹⁸

Sowing “cockel and danel,” the Devil’s husbandry is thus defined:

And this is the deuilishe ploughinge, the which worcketh to haue thinges in latine,
and letteth the fruteful edification.¹⁹

Although the accession of Mary to the throne would soon drive such sentiments temporarily underground once more,²⁰ we may see that although the exemplary ploughman had once again been embraced by the Church, it was a very different Church to that which had been addressed by Langland nearly two centuries earlier, and it was one which was irrevocably committed to the vernacular.

As the present thesis has demonstrated in the case of *Piers Plowman* and subsequent works, the dividing line between orthodoxy and heresy, when assessing vernacular works, was far from clear throughout the pre-Reformation period. As Hudson has observed,

Lollardy and orthodoxy were not in every regard mutually exclusive creeds, nor were the bounds of orthodoxy or of heterodoxy unchanging... radical orthodoxy and conservative Lollardy might look very much alike on many issues.²¹

Indeed, the flexibility of interpretation of vernacular works enabled that which was orthodox in intention to be received as heterodox. Bearing this in mind, it will perhaps be useful in future research to concentrate less on the polar opposition between “traditional” religion and its “discontents,” and instead turn to the broad range of cultural circumstances which led to individual expressions of piety being thus defined.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.30.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.31.

²⁰ However, as Jansen has noted in her study of a prophetic fragment of *Piers Plowman* in the sixteenth-century British Library MS Sloane 2578, *Piers Plowman* was mined and quoted to support anti-Marian invective: Sharon L. Jansen, “Politics, Protest, and a New *Piers Plowman* Fragment: the Voice of the Past in Tudor England,” *RES* n.s. 40 (1989): 93-99.

²¹ Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, p.429.

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